

THE
GREAT INVASION
OF 1813-14

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THE
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OF 1813-14;

OR,
AFTER LEIPZIG.

BY
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BEING
A STORY OF THE ENTRY OF THE ALLIED FORCES
INTO ALSACE AND LORRAINE, AND THEIR MARCH
UPON PARIS AFTER THE BATTLE OF
LEIPZIG, CALLED THE BATTLE OF
THE KINGS AND NATIONS.

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THE
GREAT INVASION;
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AFTER LEIPZIG.

CHAPTER I.

IF you would like to know the story of the Great Invasion of 1814, just as it was told me by the old huntsman, Frantz du Hengst, you must come with me to the village of Charmes, in that province of France called the Vosges. About thirty little houses, with stuccoed fronts, and their roofs covered with dark green moss, are dotted along the borders of the Sarre; you can see their gables round which the ivy creeps and the honeysuckle twines—the honeysuckle withered now, for winter is near—the beehives closed with wisps of straw, the little gardens, the wooden palings, the hedge-rows that divide them from each other. To the left, on a high mountain, stand the ruins of the ancient castle of Falkenstein, destroyed two hundred years ago by the Swedes. It is now nothing but a heap of ruins, over-run with brambles and weeds. The approach to it is by an old, worn pathway, called a *schlitte** road, of which you can catch a glimpse through the fir-trees. To the right,

* Roads to which the trunks of trees felled or blown down in the forest are conveyed are called *schlitte*, or sledge, roads.

on the hillside, is seen the farm of Bois-de-Chênes, a large building, with granaries, stables, and outhouses, the flat roof weighted with huge stones to resist the keen north wind. Cows are grazing on the common, and a few goats are climbing the steep rocks.

All is calm and silent.

Some children, in drawers made of a sort of gray cloth, their heads and feet bare, are warming themselves round their little fires on the outskirts of the wood. If you watch the light blue columns of smoke as they disperse in the air, or hang motionless in white and gray clouds over the valley, you will discover behind these clouds the barren tops of the Grosmann and the Donon.

Now, you must know that the last house of the village, whose square front is pierced by two glazed casements, and whose low door opens on to the muddy street, belonged in 1813 to Jean-Claude Hullin, an old volunteer of '92, but at that time a shoemaker in the village of Charmes, and held in high esteem among the simple mountaineers. Hullin was a short, stout, thick-set man, with gray eyes, thick lips, a short nose, with a strongly-marked division at the end, and thick, grayish eyebrows. He was a jovial, good-natured fellow, and didn't know how to refuse anything to his daughter, Louise, a child whom he had rescued from a troop of those wretched *Reimatshlos*—half-tinkers, half-blacksmiths*—who travel from village to village, soldering saucepans, melting spoons, and mending broken crockery. He looked upon her as his own daughter, and had completely forgotten that she was not of his blood.

Besides Louise, the worthy man had other objects of

* Without home or fireside.

affection. He loved, above all, his cousin, the old mistress of the farm of Bois-de-Chênes, Catherine Lefèvre, and her son, Gaspard, drawn in that year's conscription, a handsome young fellow, betrothed to Louise, and whose return at the end of the campaign was anxiously expected by all the family.

Hullin always dwelt proudly on the memory of his campaigns of Sambre-et-Meuse, of Italy, and Egypt. Sometimes of an evening, when his day's work was done, he would set off to the great saw-works at Valtin, formed of the trunks of trees still covered with their bark, and which you can perceive down below there at the bottom of the gorge. There, seated in the midst of the wood-cutters, charcoal-burners, and *schlittes*,* opposite the great fire made of sawdust and shavings, and whilst the heavy wheel went for ever round, amid the never-ceasing thunder of the mill-dam and the constant grinding of the saw, with his elbow on his knee, and pipe in mouth, he would talk to them of Hoche, of Kleber, and finally, of General Bonaparte, whom he had seen a hundred times, and whose spare figure, piercing eyes, and eagle glance he could paint to the very life.

Such was Jean-Claude Hullin.

He was a man of the old Gallic stock, loving extraordinary adventures and hair-breadth 'scapes, but sticking to work from a principle of duty, from year's end to year's end.

As for Louise, that waif snatched from the travelling tinkers, she had a slender, lithe figure, long delicate hands, eyes of so deep and tender a blue that they went straight to the very bottom of your soul, a complexion like snow, hair of a light straw colour, soft and fine as

* Properly *tree-fellers*.

silk, shoulders a little rounded like those of a kneeling maid at prayer. Her innocent smile, her pensive brow, in short, her whole presence reminded you of the old *lied** of the minnesinger,† Erhart, where he says, "I have beheld a ray of light; my eyes are still dazzled with its brightness. Was it the moon's beam through the foliage? Was it Aurora's smile in the depth of the woods? No; it was the beautiful Edith, my love, who passed. I have seen her, and my eyes are still dazzled."

Louise dearly loved the fields, gardens, and flowers. In spring, the first note of the lark caused her to shed tears of tender pleasure. She delighted to watch the first opening of the blue-bells and sweet-scented May that blossomed on the hillside; and eagerly awaited the return of the swallows to build their snug little nests under the eaves. She was still the child of a wandering race, only a little less wild; but Hullin made excuses for everything; he understood her nature, and would sometimes say, with a smile:

"My poor Louise, if we had nothing to live on but what you bring us—your pretty handfuls of wild flowers—we should be starved to death in three days."

Upon which she would throw her arms round his neck, and smile upon him so sweetly that he would set contentedly to work again, saying:

"Ah! What business have I to scold her? She's quite right; she loves the sun and the green fields, poor child. Gaspard must work for two; he'll have happiness enough for four. I don't pity him, not I. There's plenty of women to work, and it does not improve their looks: but women who love and are kind to you—what a chance to meet with one—what a chance!"

* Song.

† Poet, minstrel.

Thus reasoned the worthy man, and days, weeks, and months went by in the near prospect of Gaspard's return.

Gaspard's mother, widow Lefèvre, a woman of marvellous industry and energy, shared Hullin's ideas on the subject of Louise. "I," she would say, "only want a daughter who will love us; I don't want her to meddle with my housekeeping. Only let her make herself happy! You'll not disagree with me, will you, Louise?"

And then the two would fall to kissing and hugging each other!

But still Gaspard did not return, and for the last two months no news had been heard of him.

Now on a certain day, towards the middle of the month of December, 1813, between three and four o'clock in the afternoon, Hullin, squatted on his bench, was busily engaged in finishing off a pair of iron-bound sabots for the woodcutter, Rochart. Louise had just placed a little earthen pipkin on the brazen stove, the fire in which was crackling and roaring with a plaintive sound, while the old clock marked the seconds with its monotonous tick. Outside, all along the street, were to be seen pools of water covered with a thin white coating of ice, showing that winter was near at hand. At intervals was heard the sound of thick sabots on the hard ground, and then a felt hat, a hood, or a white cap would go by, and all would be still again, the silence only broken by the gentle hum of Louise's spinning-wheel, and the singing of the *marmite* on the stove. This had lasted for about two hours, when Hullin, happening to cast a glance through the little glazed window-panes, suddenly left off working, and remained staring with his eyes wide open as if struck by an unusual sight.

In fact, at the turning of the street, just opposite the inn of the "Three Pigeons," there was seen coming, in the midst of a troop of urchins, whistling, hooting, leaping, and yelling—"The King of Diamonds! the King of Diamonds!"—there was seen coming, I say, the strangest figure it is possible to imagine. Just picture to yourself a man with red hair and beard, a grave face, sullen eye, straight nose, his eyebrows joined in the middle of his forehead, a circlet of tin on his head; a long-haired, iron-gray sheepskin floating from his back, the two fore-paws of which formed the fastening around his neck; a number of little copper crosses hanging like charms on his breast; his legs encased in a sort of drawers made of gray cloth, fastened above the ankle, and his feet bare. An enormous raven, his coal-black wings relieved by a few feathers of dazzling whiteness, was perched upon his shoulder. At first sight of him, and his stately presence, you would have thought him one of those ancient Merovingian kings depicted in the paintings of Montbéliard; he held in his left hand a short thick stick, cut in the form of a sceptre, and with his right hand he made fantastic gestures, raising his finger to heaven, and seeming to address his suite.

Every door flew open as he passed—curious faces were pressed against every window-pane. Some old women, from the outer steps of the doors, called to the madman, who did not deign to turn aside his head; others came down into the street, and tried to bar his way, but he, with head erect and raised eyebrow, with a gesture and a word, forced them to stand aside.

"See," said Hullin, "here is Yégof. I did not expect to see him again this winter. It is not his usual

custom. What the devil can bring him back in such weather as this?"

And Louise, laying down her distaff, ran hastily out to look at the "King of Diamonds." The arrival of the fool Yégof at the beginning of winter was quite an event; some were delighted at it, hoping to keep him and make him tell stories of his fortune and glories, by the inn firesides; others, and especially the women, felt a sort of uneasiness, for madmen, as everybody knows, have dealings with the world of spirits; they know the past and the future, and are inspired by God; the only thing is to be able to understand them, their words having always two meanings—one common, for vulgar people, the other deep, for refined and cultivated minds.

And this fool besides, had, above all others, really extraordinary and sublime ideas. No one knew either where he came from, where he went, or what he wanted; for Yégof wandered about the country like a troubled spirit; he would talk of races now extinct, and claimed to be himself Emperor of Austrasia, Polynesia, and other places. Large volumes might have been written about his castles, his palaces, and his strongholds; he knew the numbers, situation, and architecture of them all, and celebrated their grandeur, beauty, and riches with a simple and modest air. He would speak of his stables, his hunting exploits, the officers of his crown, his ministers, his counsellors, the superintendents of his provinces; he never mistook their names or their rank, but he complained bitterly of having been dethroned by the accursed race, and the old midwife, Sapience Coquelin, every time she heard him groaning over this subject, would shed a shower of tears, as would

many others too. Then he, pointing with his finger to heaven, would exclaim :

“ Oh ! women ! oh, women ! remember ! The hour is near. The spirit of darkness flies. The old race—the masters of your masters—advance like the waves of the sea ! ”

And every spring he was in the habit of making a tour among the old owls' nests—those antique ruins that crown the wooded summits of the Vosges, Nideck, Geroldseck, Lutzelbourg, Turkestein, saying that he was going to visit his fiefs, and talking of re-establishing the ancient splendour of his States, and bringing back his revolted subjects into slavery, with the help of the grand Golo, his cousin.

Jean-Claude Hullin used to laugh at these things, not having a mind high enough to enter into the invisible spheres ; but they had a great effect upon Louise ; above all, when the great raven flapped his wings, and uttered his hoarse croak.

Yégof was coming down the street without stopping anywhere, and Louise, quite in a fright at seeing that he was fixing his eyes upon their little house, said hastily :

“ Papa Jean-Claude, I think he is coming here.”

“ Very likely,” was Jean Hullin's reply. “ The poor fellow must be in great want of a pair of strong sabots, now the cold weather is coming, and if he asks me, I should find it hard to refuse him.”

“ Oh, how good and kind you are ! ” said the young girl, with a loving kiss.

“ Yes, yes ; you coax me finely,” said he, with a laugh, “ because I do just whatever you like ; and who's to pay me for my wood and work, I should like to know ? Not Yégof, that's very certain ! ”

Louise gave him another kiss, and a tear stood in Hullin's eye as he looked at her, and murmured:

"That's the pay I like best of all."

Yégof was at that time about fifty paces off their house, and the noise and tumult grew louder and louder.

The street urchins, hanging on to his tattered robes, kept shouting: "Diamonds! spades! clubs!" All of a sudden he turned round, raising his sceptre, and, with a proud, though furious air, exclaimed:

"Begone, accursed race! Begone! Deafen me no more with your cries, or I will let loose my pack upon you."

The only effect of this threat was to redouble the hisses and shouts of laughter; but at this juncture Hullin appeared at his door, with his long strap in his hand, and picking out five or six of the most riotous, threatened to give them a taste of it for their supper—a thing which the worthy man had often done before, with the full consent of their parents—when all the troop dispersed helter-skelter. Then, turning towards the maniac:

"Come in, Yégof," said the shoemaker: "come in, and warm yourself by the fire."

"My name is not Yégof," replied the poor fellow, with an offended air: "my name is Luitprand, King of Austrasia and Polynesia."

"Yes, yes, I know," said Jean-Claude, "I know; you have told me all that before; but no matter whether your name is Yégof or Luitprand, come in all the same. It is cold; try and warm yourself."

"I will come in," replied the fool, "but it is on a very serious affair—an ~~affair~~ of state: it is to form

an indissoluble alliance between the Germans and the Triboques."

"Very good—we will talk about it."

Then Yégof, stooping under the portal, entered, in a dreamy absent manner, and made a profound bow to Louise, at the same time lowering his sceptre ; but the raven would not come in. Spreading his immense wings, he swept in a vast circle round the dwelling, and wound up his flight by beating himself against the window panes furiously enough to break them.

"Hans," cried the fool, "take care ! I'll come to you !"

But the bird would not detach his sharp claws from the leaden staples, and continued to flap his great wings against the casement as long as his master stayed in the house. Louise never took her eyes off him ; she was afraid of him. As for Yégof, he took his seat in the old leathern arm-chair behind the stove, with his legs extended as if on a throne—and, casting a haughty look around him, said :

"I come from Jerome in a straight line to conclude an alliance with you, Hullin. You are not ignorant that I have deigned to cast my eyes on your daughter, and I come to ask her of you in marriage."

Louise, at this proposal, blushed up to her ears, and Hullin burst into a peal of loud laughter.

"You laugh !" cried the fool, in a hollow voice. "Well, you are wrong to laugh. This alliance can alone save you from the ruin that threatens you—you, and your house, and all that is yours. At this very moment my armies are advancing—they are innumerable—they cover the earth. What can you do against me ? You will be conquered, destroyed, or reduced to slavery, as you have already been during many ages ;

for I, Luitprand, King of Austrasia and Polynesia, have resolved all shall return to the ancient order of things. Remember!"

Here the fool solemnly raised his finger.

"Remember what happened before!—You were beaten!—And we, the old races of the North—we put our foot on your necks. We laid the heaviest stones on your backs, to build our strong castles, and our subterranean prisons. We harnessed you to our carts—you were before us as the straw before the hurricane. Remember, remember, Triboque—and tremble!"

"I remember very well," said Hullin, still laughing; "but we took our revenge—you know."

"Yes, yes," interrupted the fool, with a frown; "but that time is past. My warriors are more numerous than the leaves of the forest; and your blood flows like the water of the brooks. You! I know you—I have known you during more than a thousand years!"

"Bah!" was Hullin's reply.

"Yes, it is this hand, do you hear—this hand that subdued you, when we arrived for the first time in the midst of your forests!—it bowed your head beneath the yoke, and it will bow it again! Because you are brave, you think yourselves for ever masters of this country and of all France. Well, well, you are wrong! We have shared your country, and will share it again. We will restore Alsace and Lorraine to Germany, Brittan and Normandy to the men of the North, and Flanders and the South to Spain. We will make a little kingdom of France round Paris—quite a little kingdom, with a descendant of the old race at your head, and you shall not stir any more—you shall be very quiet. He! he! he!" and Yégof laughed.

Hullin, who knew very little of history, was surprised that the fool should know so many names.

"Bah! have done, Yégof," said he, "and take a little soup to warm your stomach."

"I do not ask for your soup—I ask of you this girl in marriage—the handsomest in my States. Give her to me willingly, and I will raise you to the steps of my throne; if not, my armies will take her by force, and you shall not have the honour of having given her to me."

As he spoke, the unhappy man regarded Louise with a look of profound admiration.

"How lovely she is!" said he; "I destine her to the highest honours. Rejoice, young girl, rejoice—you shall be queen of Austrasia!"

"Listen, Yégof," said Hullin: "I am much flattered by your offer—it proves that you appreciate beauty! That is very right; but my daughter is already betrothed to Gaspard Lefèvre."

"But I," exclaimed the fool, in an angry tone, "will not listen to that." Then rising, "Hullin," said he, resuming his solemn air, "this is my first offer. I shall renew it twice. Do you hear? Twice! And if you persist in your obstinacy, woe! woe to you and to your race!"

"What! will you not eat your soup?"

"No! no!" yelled the fool. "I will accept nothing from you till you have consented. Nothing! nothing!"

And as he went towards the door, to the great joy of Louise, who kept watching the raven flap his wings against the window-panes, he said, raising his sceptre, "Twice more!" and went out.

Hullin burst into a loud laugh.

"Poor devil!" said he. "In spite of himself, his mouth watered for the soup. His stomach is empty—his teeth chattered with cold and hunger. Well, folly is stronger than either."

"Oh, how he did frighten me," said Louise.

"Well, well, my child, never mind; he is gone. He can see you are pretty, fool as he is. There is nothing in that to be afraid of."

But in spite of these words, and the departure of the fool, Louise still trembled, and felt herself blush as she thought of the looks the wretched being had cast on her.

In the meantime, Yégof had retaken the road to Valtin. He could be seen walking gravely away, his raven perched upon his shoulder, and making strange signs and gestures, although there was no one near him. Night was at hand, and soon the tall form of the King of Diamonds blended with the gray tints of the winter twilight, and finally disappeared.



CHAPTER II.

ON the evening of the same day, after supper, Louise, having taken her spinning-wheel, had gone to spend the evening with Dame Rochart, at whose cottage all the old gossips and young girls of the neighbourhood were in the habit of assembling, relating old legends, chatting about the rain, the weather, marriages, christenings, the departure or the return of the conscripts, and what not—all of which helped to pass away the time in a very agreeable manner.

Hullin sat alone, opposite his little copper lamp, repairing the old woodcutter's sabots. Already he thought no more of the fool, Yégof; his hammer went up and down, hitting the big nails into the thick wooden soles, and all mechanically, and from force of habit. A thousand thoughts, however, passed through his head; he was a dreamer without knowing why.

At times he thought of Gaspard, who, for a long while, had given no sign of life; then of the campaign, which was being indefinitely prolonged. The lamp lit up with its yellowish flame the little smoky cabin. Outside not a sound was to be heard. The fire was almost out; Jean-Claude rose to throw on a fresh log, then sat down again, murmuring :

"Bah! this cannot go on much longer. We shall have a letter one of these days."

The old clock began to strike nine; and as Hullin resumed his work, the door opened, and Catherine Lefèvre, the mistress of the Bois-de-Chênes farm, appeared on the threshold, to the great surprise of the shoemaker, for it was not usual for her to leave her home at such an hour.

Catherine Lefèvre might be about sixty years of age, but she was as upright and straight as at thirty. Her clear gray eyes and hooked nose gave to her face somewhat the look of a bird of prey; her sunken cheeks, and the corners of her mouth, drawn down by thought, added something of a gloomy and bitter expression; two or three thick locks of grizzled hair hung down on each side of her temples; on her head she wore a striped brown hood, which covered her shoulders also down to her elbows; in short, her whole aspect denoted a character firm to obstinacy, mingled with something of grandeur and sadness which inspired at once respect and fear.

"You, Catherine!" said Hullin, surprised out of himself.

"Yes, it is I," replied the old farm-mistress, in a calm tone. "I am come to talk a little with you, Jean-Claude. Is Louise gone out?"

"She is spending the evening with Madeline Rochart."

"That is well."

Then Catherine threw back her hood, and came and sat down beside the bench. Hullin looked at her steadfastly; he was struck by an appearance of something at once extraordinary and mysterious.

"What is the matter?" said he, laying down his hammer.

Instead of replying to this question, the old woman, looking towards the door, seemed to be listening ; then, hearing nothing, she resumed her musing look.

"The fool Yégof passed last night at the farm," said she.

"He came to see me, too, this afternoon," said Hullin, without attaching any importance to this fact, which seemed to him of no moment.

"Yes," replied the old woman, in a low tone, "he passed the night at our house, and yesterday evening, at this hour, in the kitchen, before everybody, that man, that madman, related the most fearful things to us !"

She was silent, and the corners of her mouth seemed to be drawn down lower than usual.

"Fearful things !" murmured the shoemaker, more and more surprised, for he had never seen the farm-mistress in such a state before, "but what sort, Catherine, what sort ?"

"Dreams that I have had !"

"Dreams ! you must be laughing at me, surely !"

"No."

Then, after a moment's silence, looking at the wonder-struck Hullin, she went on slowly :

"Yesterday evening, then, after supper, all our people were assembled in the kitchen, round the fire. The table was still covered with the empty bowls, platters, and spoons. Yégof had supped with us, and been diverting us with the history of his treasures, his castles, and his provinces. It might be then about nine o'clock—the fool had just seated himself in the corner, beside the blazing hearth. Duchêne, my labourer, was botching Bruno's saddle ; the shepherd, Robin, was weaving a

basket; Annette was arranging her pots and pans on the dresser, while I had brought my wheel to the fire to spin a hank before going to bed. Out of doors, the dogs were barking at the moon; it must have been very cold. Well, there we all were, talking about the winter that was coming; Duchêne was saying that it would be very hard, for he had seen large flocks of wild geese, which is a sure sign: and Yégof's raven, perched on the edge of the chimney-piece, his great head buried in his ruffled plumes, seemed to be asleep; but from time to time he stretched out his neck, preened a feather or two with his bill, then looked at us, listening for a second, and again plunged his head between his shoulders."

The farm-mistress was silent for a moment, as if to collect her thoughts. She cast down her eyes; her long, hooked nose bent itself almost to her lips, and a strange paleness seemed to spread over her face.

"What on earth is she driving at?" said Hullin to himself.

The old woman went on:

"Yégof, beside the blazing hearth, with his tin crown on his head, his short staff between his knees, was dreaming of something. He looked at the great black fire-place, the large stone chimney-piece, with figures and trees carved upon it, and the smoke which was rising in heavy wreaths round the flitches of bacon. All at once, when we were least thinking of it, he struck the end of his staff upon the stones, and cried out, like one in a dream: 'Yes, yes; I have seen all that. It is a long time ago—a long time.' And as we all looked at him, struck with surprise—'At that time,' he went on, 'the fir forests were forests of oak—the Nideck

the Dagsberg, the Falkenstein, the Geroldseck; none of those old castles, now in ruins, existed then. At that time they used to hunt the wild oxen in the woods, fish for salmon in the Sarre; and you—you fair-skinned men, buried in the snow six months in the year—you lived upon milk and cheese; for you had large flocks and herds on the Hengst, the Schneeberg, the Grosmann, and the Donon. In summer, you hunted; you came trooping down to the banks of the Rhine, the Moselle, the Meuse. Oh, yes; I remember all that.'

"Strange to say, Jean-Claude, while the fool continued speaking, I seemed to see again all those countries of former times, and to remember them as a dream. I had let fall my distaff, and old Duchêne, Robin, Jeanne—in short, every one, was listening eagerly. 'Yes, it is a long time ago,' the fool began again. 'In those times, too, you used to build these huge fire-places; and all around, at two or three hundred paces, you used to fix your palings fifteen feet high, and inside of them you used to keep your great dogs, with hanging dewlaps, who barked night and day.'

"Whatever he said, Jean-Claude, we saw. As for him, he seemed to pay no heed to us, but kept looking at the figures on the chimney-piece, with his mouth wide open; but at the end of a moment, having turned his head towards us, and seeing us all attentive, he began to laugh with that wild laugh of his, exclaiming: 'And at that time—oh! fair-haired men with blue eyes and white skins, fed on milk and cheese, and only drinking blood in the autumn, at the great hunts—

you believed yourselves masters of the plain and of the mountain, when we, the red men with green eyes, sprung from the sea; we, who drank blood always, and loved nothing but war, arrived one fine morning, with our axes and our spears, coming up the Sarre under shadow of the old oaks. Ah! it was a cruel war, and one that lasted weeks and months. And the old woman, there,' said he, pointing to me, with a strange smile, 'the Margareth of the clan of the Kilberix, that old woman with the hooked nose—within her palisades, in the midst of her dogs and her warriors, defended herself like a she-wolf. But at the end of five moons hunger came: the gates of her palisades opened for flight, and we—in ambush in the stream—we massacred all—all, except the children and the beautiful young girls. The old woman alone, with her nails and her teeth, defended herself to the last. And I, Luitprand—I cleft her gray head, and I took her father, the blind man, the aged of many days, and chained him to the gate of my strong castle like a dog.'

"Then, Hullin," continued the farm-mistress, bowing down her head—then the fool began to sing a long song—the complaint of the old man chained to his gate. Wait while I try and remember it. It was sad—sad as a *miserere*. I cannot recollect it, Jean-Claude; but I seem to hear it still: it froze the marrow in my bones. And as he kept laughing all the while, our people at last grew furious. With a terrible cry, Duchêne sprang at the throat of the fool to strangle him; but he, stronger than you would think, repulsed him, and raising his staff threateningly, exclaimed:

"On your knees, slaves—on your knees! My armies

are advancing. Do you hear them? The earth trembles beneath their tread. Those castles—the Nideck, the Haut-Barr, the Dagsberg, the Turkestein—you will have to rebuild them. On your knees!

“Never in my life did I see a countenance more terrific than that of Yégof at this moment; but, for the second time seeing my people about to rush upon him, I felt bound to defend him.

“‘He is a madman,’ said I. ‘Are you not ashamed to take heed of the words of a fool?’ They stopped on account of what I said; but for my own part I could not close an eye the whole night long. I lay awake hour after hour, thinking of what the wretched creature had said. I seemed to hear the song of the old man, the barking of the dogs, and the sounds of battle. It is long since I have felt so disturbed and unhappy. That is why I have come to see you. What do you think of all this, Hullin?”

“I!” said the shoemaker, whose full, red face betrayed a sort of sad scorn mixed with pity; “if I did not know you as well as I do, Catherine, I should say that you had gone out of your mind—you, Duchêne, Robin, and all the rest of them. It all sounds to me like one of the tales of Genevieve de Brabant—a story made to frighten little children, and which shows us the folly of our ancestors.”

“Because you do not understand these things,” said the old farm-mistress, in a calm and grave tone; “you never had any ideas of this sort.”

“Then you believe what Yégof sang to you?”

“Yes, I believe it.”

“What, you, Catherine—a woman of your sense?

If it were Dame Rochart, I should think nothing of it. But you!——”

He rose quite indignant, took off his apron, shrugged his shoulders, and then abruptly sat down again, saying, “Do you know who this raving maniac is? Well, I will tell you. You may be sure he is one of those German schoolmasters who puzzle their brain over an old story of Mother Goose, and discuss it gravely with you. By dint of studying, dreaming, pondering, looking for knots in a bulrush, their brain gets bewildered—they have visions, distorted dreams, and take those dreams for gospel. I have always looked upon Yégof as one of those poor creatures, he knows a host of names; he talks of Brittany and Austrasia, of Polynesia and the Nideck; and then of the Geroldseck, the Turkestein, the borders of the Rhine: in short, of everything; at random till at length there seems to be something in it, while in truth there is nothing. At another time, you would think with me, Catherine; but you are in trouble at not having had any news from Gaspard. These rumours of war, of invasion, that are going about, torment you, disturb your rest. You cannot sleep, and so you come to look upon the babble of a fool as the words of Holy Writ.”

“No, Hullin—it is not so. You, yourself, if you had heard Yégof——”

“Stuff and nonsense!” exclaimed the honest man. “If I had heard it I should have laughed in his face, as just now——By the way, do you know that he came to ask Louise’s hand of me, to make her Queen of Austrasia?”

Catherine Lefèvre could not restrain a smile; but

immediately resuming her serious manner: "All your reasons, Jean-Claude," said she, "do not convince me; but I confess Gaspard's silence alarms me. I know my son. I am certain he has written to me. Why, then, have not his letters reached me? The war is going badly, Hullin; we have the whole world against us. They will have none of our revolution; you know that as well as me. As long as we had the upper hand, and gained victory upon victory, they were hand-and-glove with us; but, since our disasters in Russia, things have taken another turn."

"Ah! ha! Catherine, how your head wanders. You look always on the black side of things."

"Yes, I do look on the black side of things, and I am right. What troubles me most is that we get no news from the outer world; we live here like a nation of savages, and know nothing of what is going on around us. The Austrians and the Cossacks may fall upon us from one day to the next, before we know where we are."

Hullin observed the growing excitement of the old woman, and was infected, in spite of himself, by the influence of her fears.

"Listen, Catherine," said he, all at once; "when you talk in a rational way, it is not for me to contradict you. All that you say now is possible. Not that I believe it; still, there is no knowing. I was intending to go to Phalsbourg in about a week, to buy some sheepskin to line my sabots. I will go to-morrow. At Phalsbourg, a fortified place, and a post-town, moreover, there must be some reliable news to be had. Will you believe what I bring you from there?"

“Yes.”

“Good; then that is settled. I will set out early to-morrow. It is five leagues; about six o’clock I shall be back. You will see, Catherine, that your gloomy ideas are against all common sense.”

“I hope so,” replied the farm-mistress, rising; “I hope so. You have comforted me a little, Hullin. And now I will go back to the farm, and, I hope, sleep better than I did last night. Good night, Jean-Claude.”



CHAPTER III.

ON the morrow, at daybreak, Hullin, attired in his Sunday pantaloons of thick blue cloth, his ample brown velvet surcoat, his red waistcoat with metal buttons, and a broad-brimmed felt hat on his head, which, looped up in front like a cockade, exposed to view his rubicund face, set out on his way to Phalsbourg, with a stout walking-stick in his hand.

Phalsbourg is a little fortified place on the high road between Strasbourg and Paris. It commands the borders of Saverne, the defiles of the upper Barr, of Roche-Plate, of Bonne Fontaine, and of the Graufthal. Its bastions, its outworks, its half-moons, are carved in zigzag on a rocky platform. At a distance, it seems as if you could clear the walls with a single stride ; but, as you approach, you discover the ditch, which is a hundred feet broad and thirty feet deep, and the gloomy ramparts cut in the rock opposite. That brings you to a stand. For the rest, with the exception of the church, the commune hall, the two gates of France and Germany in form of a mitre, and the belfreys of the two powder-mills, all is hidden behind the glacis. Such is the little town of Phalsbourg, which is not wanting in a certain character of grandeur, especially when you cross its bridges, and enter beneath its low massive portals and bristling portcullises. In the

interior, the houses are built at regular intervals ; they are low, well-constructed buildings, built of hewn stone : everything about the place has a military look.

Hullin, inclined, by his sturdy nature and jovial disposition, never to give himself unnecessary alarm about the future, considered all the reports of retreat and invasion that were flying about the country as so many lies spread by scandal. You may, therefore, judge his surprise when, on quitting the mountain, and arrived at the outskirts of the forests, he saw the suburbs of the town razed to the ground ; not a garden, not an orchard, not a walk, not a tree, not a shrub was left : all had been levelled that was within reach of gun-shot. A few poor wretches were trying to collect the scattered fragments of their habitations, and were carrying them to the town. Nothing was visible on the horizon but the long, gloomy line of ramparts towering overhead. Jean-Claude felt as if struck by a thunder-bolt ; for a few minutes he could not utter a single word, or take a single step.

"Oh, ho !" said he, at length, "this looks bad—this looks very bad ! They are expecting the enemy !"

And then his warlike instincts began quickly to get the upper hand of him, and his brown cheeks grew crimson.

"And it is those beggars of Austrians, Prussians, and Russians, and all the scum collected from one end of Europe to the other, that are the cause of this," he exclaimed, flourishing his stick ; "but let them beware ! we will make them pay dearly for it !"

He was in a sort of white rage, such as honest men feel when urged beyond bounds. Woe to any one who had thwarted him at that moment !

About twenty minutes afterwards he entered the town at the end of a long file of vehicles, to which five and even six horses were harnessed, and who were drawing with great efforts enormous trunks of trees, destined to form block-houses. Among the drivers, the country people, and the horses, neighing, rearing, and stamping, gravely rode a mounted *gendarme* named Kels, who seemed to take no note of anything, and only said in a bluff voice: "Courage, courage, my friends—we have two more stages to do by the evening. You will have deserved well of your country!"

Jean-Claude passed over the bridge.

In the town a fresh spectacle presented itself to his eyes. There all were ardently preparing for its defence every door was open, and men, women, and children were coming and going in every direction, to assist in the transport of gunpowder and projectiles. At times they collected in groups of three, four, and six, to gather the news.

"Hey! neighbour!"

"What now?"

"A courier has just arrived at full gallop; he came in by the French gate."

"Then he comes to announce the arrival of the National Guard from Nancy."

"Or, perhaps, a convoy from Metz."

"You are right—we are short of sixteen-pound shot, and also want grape-shot. They are going to cast a lot."

Some honest citizens in shirt-sleeves, mounted on tables along the foot-paths, were busily engaged in blocking up their windows with thick planks of wood and mattrasses. Others were rolling water-barrels in



"HE ENTERED THE TOWN AT THE END OF A LONG FILE OF VEHICLES."

front of their doors. Hullin felt reassured at witnessing so much enthusiasm.

"All right!" he exclaimed; "everybody seems to be making holiday here. The Allies will meet with a warm reception."

Opposite the college the shrill voice of the town-crier, Harmentier, was heard proclaiming: "This is to give notice that the casemates will be thrown open, in order that every one may be able to transport thither a mattress and two coverlets for his own personal use; and that the commissioners are to commence their tour of inspection, to ascertain that every inhabitant has three months' provisions laid up in store, the which he is to certify.—This 20th of December, 1813. JEAN-PIERRE MEUNIER, Governor."

All this Hullin heard and saw in less than a minute, for the whole town seemed to have turned out. Strange, serious, and comic scenes followed close upon each other without interruption.

Some National Guards were dragging a twenty-four pounder in the direction of the arsenal. These brave fellows had a steep ascent to climb, and their strength was nearly exhausted. "Hoy!—all together! A thousand thunders! Put your shoulder to it! Forward!" Thus shouting all together, and pushing with all their strength at the wheels, the great cannon, stretching out its long, bronze neck over its immense carriage, which rose above everything, rolled slowly over the pavement, trembling beneath its weight.

Hullin was in such a state of delight that he was no longer like the same man. His martial instincts—the recollection of the camp, the march, the fire, and the battle—all returned at full speed; his eye sparkled,

his heart beat quicker, and already ideas of defence, entrenchments, death-struggles, whirled rapidly through his brain.

“ Upon my word ! ” said he to himself, “ all this looks well ! I have made sabots enough in my life-time ; and since I have a chance of shouldering a musket again, well and good !—so much the better ; we will show the Prussians and Austrians that we have not forgotten our old trade.”

So reasoned the brave man, carried away by warlike recollections ; but his joy was not of long duration.

In the square in front of the church were stationed fifteen or twenty carts filled with the wounded that kept arriving from Leipzig and Hanau. These unfortunates—pale, wan, with fast glazing eye ; some whose limbs had been already amputated, others whose wounds had not been even dressed—were patiently awaiting death. Beside them stood some old, worn-out horses, munching their meagre allowance ; while their drivers, poor devils taken into employ at Alsace, wrapped in their ragged cloaks, were sleeping, with their hats pulled over their brows, and their arms folded across their breasts, on the steps of the church. It made one shudder to see these wretched groups of human beings, in their large gray coats, as they lay jumbled together upon the bloody straw ; one supporting his broken arm upon his knees ; another with his head bandaged with an old handkerchief ; a third, already dead, serving as a seat for the living—his blackened hands hanging over the side of the cart. Hullin stood rooted to the ground in the presence of this dismal spectacle. He could not turn his eyes aside. It is in the power of great human griefs to fascinate us thus ; we have a morbid wish to

see how men perish—how they face death: the best of us are not free from this frightful curiosity. It seems as if eternity was revealing its secrets to us.

There, too, near the shafts of the first cart, to the right of the file, were squatted two carbineers in sky-blue tunics—two real Colossuses, whose iron frames were bowed beneath the pressure of hardship. They might have been taken for two caryatides, crushed beneath the weight of an enormous mass. One with thick red moustaches, and hollow cheeks, gazed around with lustreless eyes, as if just awakening from a frightful dream. The other, bent double, his shoulder torn by a grapeshot wound, was gradually growing weaker and weaker, at times raising himself up with a start, and talking low, as if dreaming. Behind lay, stretched in couples, infantry soldiers, most of them struck by a ball, and with a broken arm or leg. They seemed to endure their fate with more firmness than the giants. These unfortunates did not speak a word, with the exception of a few among the youngest, who passionately cried for water and bread. And in one of the carts, a plaintive voice, the voice of a conscript, was heard calling, “Mother! mother!”—whilst some of the older ones smiled gloomily, as much as to say: “Your mother!—oh! yes, she will be sure to come!” This was what their looks said; perhaps, in reality, they were past thinking of anything.

From time to time a sort of shudder ran through this sad assemblage of human beings. That was when several of the wounded half raised themselves, and instantly fell back again, as if Death, at that precise moment, had been going his rounds among them.

Then all was silent again!

And as Hullin stood watching all this, and feeling his very heart sicken within him,—just at that moment a shopkeeper in the Square, Sôme the baker, came out of his house, carrying a large saucepan filled with soup. It was then a sight, to behold all those ghosts move restlessly on their straw, their eyes sparkling, their nostrils dilating; new life seemed to be given them, for the poor wretches were dying of hunger.

The good baker, Sôme, with tears in his eyes, approached, saying:

“Here I am, my children!—a little patience! It’s I—you know me?”

But he had no sooner reached the first cart than the huge carbineer with hollow cheeks plunged his arm up to the elbow in the boiling soup, seized the meat, and hid it under his coat; all this was done with the rapidity of lightning. Immediately, savage yells broke forth on all sides. Those who had strength to move seemed as if they would have devoured their comrade; while he, with his two arms crossed upon his breast, his teeth fixed in his prey, and his squinting eye looking both ways at once, seemed deaf to their threats. On hearing the uproar, an old soldier, a sergeant, rushed out of a neighbouring inn. He was an old campaigner; he saw at a glance what was the matter, and, without loss of time, snatched the meat from the ferocious beast, saying:

“You deserve to have none at all. It is going to be divided. We shall cut it into ten rations!”

“There are only eight of us!” said one of the wounded—very calm in appearance, but whose eye glared with feverish excitement.

“How, eight?”

"You can see, sergeant, that these two are going to kick the bucket—it'd be wasting good provisions!"

The old sergeant cast a look at the cart.

"He is right," said he; "divide it into eight portions!"

Hullin could see no more; he withdrew to the house of the innkeeper, Wittman, opposite, as pale as death. Wittman was also a dealer in leather and furs. On seeing him enter, he exclaimed:

"What! is that you, Master Jean-Claude?—you come earlier than usual; I did not expect you till next week."

Then, seeing him stagger, he continued:

"But, what is it? There is something the matter?"

"I have just been seeing the wounded."

"Oh! I see; the first time—I know it makes you feel queer; but if you had seen fifteen thousand of them go by, as we have, you'd think nothing of it."

"A pint of wine—quick!" said Hullin, who felt himself turning sick. "Oh, men, men—and we call ourselves brothers!"

"Yes, brothers; as far as the pocket is considered," replied Wittman. "Here, take a drink, it will set you right."

"And do you mean to tell me you have seen fifteen thousand such go by?"

"At the very least, during the last two months, to say nothing of those who are left in Alsace and the other side of the Rhine; for, you see, they couldn't find carts enough for all, and then some of them weren't worth the trouble of carrying away."

"Oh! yes. I see! but why are these unfortunate

men there? Why do they not take them to the hospital?"

"The hospital! what is the good of a hospital—of ten hospitals—for fifty thousand wounded? All the hospitals, from Mayence and Coblenz to Phalsbourg, a crowded. And besides, that terrible malady, the typhu fever, do you see, Hullin, kills more than the cannon-ball. All the villages of the plain for twenty leagues round are infected; they are dying off everywhere like flies. Luckily, the town has been in a state of siege for the last three days, the gates are going to be shut, no person will be allowed to enter. Why, I myself have lost my uncle Christian and my aunt Lisbeth—both as well and hearty as you and I are at this present moment, Master Jean-Claude. And now the cold has come at last. There was a white frost last night."

"And were the wounded left out in the open air all night?"

"No, they arrived from Saverne this morning; in an hour or two, just time to give the horses a little rest, they will set out for Sarrebourg."

At this moment, the old sergeant, who had been settling affairs with the wounded in the carts, entered, rubbing his hands.

"Ha! ha!" said he, "it's sharp weather, Master Wittman; and you have done wisely to light the fire in the stove. A little sup of brandy, just to keep the fog out. Hum! hum!"

In spite of his little puckered-up eyes and hatchet-shaped nose, the countenance of the old soldier beamed with good humour and joviality. His whole figure was martial, his face bronzed by exposure to the open air, frank and open, though tinged with an expres-

sion of sly humour; his tall shako, large great-coat of grayish-blue, the belt, the very epaulette, all seemed part and parcel of himself. He could not have been sketched otherwise. He kept striding up and down the room, rubbing his hands, while Wittman poured him out a dram of brandy. Hullin, seated near the window, had instantly noticed the number of his regiment—6th Light Infantry. Gaspard, son of the farm-mistress Lefèvre, served in this regiment. Jean-Claude could now hear news of Louise's betrothed; but just as he was about to speak, his heart nearly failed him: "If Gaspard were dead; if he had perished, like so many others!"

The worthy sabot-maker felt as if he were choking. He was silent. "Better," thought he, "to know nothing at all."

And yet, in a few minutes' time, he was unable to restrain himself.

"Sergeant," said he, in a hoarse voice, "you belong to the 6th Light?"

"Yes, neighbour," said the other, returning to the middle of the room.

"Do you happen to know a young man named Gaspard Lefèvre?"

"Gaspard Lefèvre, of the 2nd division of the 1st—do I know him? Why, I taught him his drill: a brave soldier, by all that's blue! hard as iron. If we had about a hundred thousand of his mettle——"

"Then he is alive?—he is well?"

"Yes, friend. That is to say, he was on Dec. 15th, when I quitted the regiment at Fredericsthal, to escort this convoy of wounded; but in such times as these, you see, we can't answer for anything; from one moment

to the next we are each of us liable to be sent to our account. But a week ago, at Fredericsthal, Gaspard Lefèvre answered to the muster-roll."

Jean-Claude drew a long breath.

"But, sergeant," said he, "do me the favour to tell me why Gaspard has not written home for two months?"

The old soldier smiled, and winked his little twinkling eyes.

"What the deuce, my good friend," said he; "do you think people have nothing better to do in war time than write letters?"

"No; for I served myself in the campaigns of Sambre-et-Meuse, Italy, and Egypt; but that did not prevent my writing home to let them know how I was getting on."

"One moment, comrade," interrupted the sergeant; "I, too, have served in Italy and Egypt; but the campaign we have just ended is not like either of those; it's quite another sort of thing."

"It has been very severe, then?"

"Severe! I believe you! All may thank their lucky stars who have not left their bones to bleach there. Everything was against us. Sickness, traitors, the peasants, the shopkeepers, our Allies—in short, everything. Of our company, which left Phalsbourg in full marching order on the 21st of last January, there have returned only thirty-two men. I think Gaspard Lefèvre is the only one of the conscripts left. Poor fellows! they fought well; but they were not used to starving, and they melted away like butter on a stove."

So saying, the old soldier approached the counter, and tossed off his brandy at a single draught.

"Your health, friend. Are you, by chance, the father of Gaspard?"

"No; I am a relation."

"Well, you have reason to be proud of him. What a fine young fellow for twenty! Yes, in spite of all, he has kept his post while others gave in by dozens."

"But still," pursued Hullin, after a moment's silence, "I'm at a loss to see what there was in this last campaign so different to all others; for we also had sicknesses—traitors to encounter."

"Different!" exclaimed the sergeant; "everything was different. Formerly, if you fought with us in Germany, you must remember that after one or two victories it was all over; people received you well; you drank wine and ate sour-kROUT and ham with the worthy citizens, or danced with their fat wives. The husbands and grandpapas shook their sides with laughing, and when the regiment took its departure, everybody was ready to cry their eyes out. But this time, after Lutzen and Bautzen, instead of coming round, the people only made wry faces at you; you could get nothing, except by force, till you would almost have thought yourself in Spain or La Vendée. I don't know what they had taken into their heads against us. Again, if we had been nothing but Frenchmen, and hadn't had heaps of Saxons and other allies, who were only waiting the opportunity to spring at our throats, we should have gained the day all the same, one against five; but the Allies!—never talk to me of allies again! Why, look now at Leipzig, the 18th of last October, in the very midst of the battle, our Allies turned against us, and fired at us from behind: those were our

fine friends, the Saxons. A week after, our once excellent friends, the Bavarians, came and threw themselves in the way of our retreat. We had to cut our way through them at Hanau. The next day, close to Frankfort, another column of good friends present themselves. They had to be crushed. In short, the more of them you kill, the more spring up in your path. And now, here we are on this side of the Rhine. Well, rest assured we have yet more of these good friends all the way from Moscow on our track. Oh, if we could only have foreseen this after Austerlitz, Jena, Friedland, and Wagram !”

Hullin had grown quite thoughtful.

“And what is the state of things with us now ?” he asked.

“The state of things is, that we have been obliged to re-cross the Rhine, and that all our strong places on the other side are besieged. The 10th of last November, the Prince of Neufchâtel reviewed the regiment at Bleckheim. The soldiers of the third battalion were transferred to the second, and the skeleton of the regiment was to hold itself in readiness to set out for the dépôt. The skeletons exist sure enough, but where are the men ? No wonder there are none, bled as they have been at every pore. All Europe is up in arms. The Emperor is at Paris ; he is preparing his plan of campaign. Let them only give us breathing-time till spring !”

Just at this moment, Wittman, who was standing by the window, said :—“Here comes the Governor—he has been examining the abattis and defences round the town.”

And they saw the commandant, Jean-Pierre Meunier, his head adorned with a large three-cornered hat, and wearing a tricolour scarf round his waist, crossing the square.

"Ah," said the sergeant, "I must go and get him to sign the order of march. Excuse me, friend, I must leave you."

"Good-bye, sergeant, and thank you. If you see Gaspard again, tell him that Jean-Claude Hullin desires to be remembered to him, and that all in his village are anxiously expecting to hear from him."

"Certainly, certainly. I will not fail." The sergeant went out, and Hullin sat thoughtfully and silently finishing his pint of wine.

"Neighbour Wittman," said he, after a moment's pause, "where is my parcel?"

"It is ready, Master Jean-Claude."

Then, looking in at the kitchen door, he called out:—"Grédel, Grédel, bring Master Hullin's parcel!"

A little woman appeared at this summons, and placed on the table a bundle of sheepskins. Jean-Claude passed his stick through the bundle, and put it on his shoulder.

"What, are you going to start directly?"

"Yes, neighbour Wittman; the days are short, and it is bad travelling through the woods after six o'clock. I must get home betimes."

"A safe journey to you, then, Master Jean-Claude."

Hullin went out, and crossed the square, keeping his eyes turned aside from the convoy of wounded and dying, who were still stationed in front of the church.

And the innkeeper, as he watched him from his window setting off at a good round pace, said to himself—

“How pale he was when he came in; he could scarcely stand upon his legs. It’s droll now, a rough man, an old soldier like him, to be so upset, while I could see fifty regiments of wounded go by in carts without thinking more about it than my morning pipe.”



CHAPTER IV.

WHILST Hullin, informed of the disasters that had befallen our armies, was walking with downcast head and knitted brows towards the village of Charmes, all was going on as usual at the farm of Bois-de-Chênes. The fantastic stories of Yégof—the rumours of war—were alike forgotten for the present; old Duchêne led his oxen to the water, the shepherd Robin foddered his cattle, and Annette and Jeanne skimmed their pans of milk, and made their curds-and-whey. Catherine Lefèvre alone, gloomy and silent, mused continually on the past, while, at the same time, overlooking with an impassive face the doings of her household. She was too old, and of too serious a nature, to forget from one day to the next anything that had so greatly moved her.

When night came, after the evening meal, she went into the inner apartment, where her people heard her take the heavy ledger from the cupboard, and lay it on the table, to make up her accounts, as it was her custom to do.

They immediately began to load the heavy cart with corn, vegetables, and poultry, for on the morrow it was market-day at Sarrebourg, and Duchêne was to set out at daybreak.

Picture to yourself this large kitchen, and all these

honest people making haste to finish their work before going to bed; the big black pan smoking on an immense fire made of fir cones, and glowing with crimson heat; the dishes, pots, and porringers shining like suns upon the dresser; the bunches of garlic and golden onions hanging in rows from the brown rafters of the ceiling, among the hams and fitches of bacon; Jeanne, with her bright blue head-dress and short scarlet petticoat, stirring the contents of the pan with a great wooden spoon; large wicker hencoops, with the clucking fowls, and the great red cock thrusting his head between the bars, and watching the fire with a surprised eye, and head twisted on one side; the mastiff, Michel, with flat head and hanging jaws, prowling about in quest of some stray morsel; Dubourg descending the creaking staircase on the left, with bent back, a sack on his shoulder, and his other hand placed archwise on his hip; whilst outside, in the darkness of the night, old Duchêne, standing upright in the cart, holds up his lantern, and calls out:—"That makes the fifteenth, Dubourg; two more."

There was also hanging against the wall an old brown hare brought by the huntsman Heinrich to be sold in the market, and a fine grouse, his green and red feathers glistening in the firelight, with glazed eye, and a drop of blood at the tip of his beak.

It was about half-past seven when the sound of footsteps was heard in the courtyard. The mastiff went growling towards the door. He listened, sniffed the night air, and then quietly returned to his place by the fire.

"It is some one belonging to the farm," said Annette.
"Michel does not stir."

Directly after, old Duchêne was heard outside, saying, "Good night, Master Jean-Claude. Is it you?"

"Yes; I have just arrived from Phalsbourg, and I have come to rest for a moment before going down to the village. Is Catherine in?"

And as he spoke, the honest man appeared in the bright firelight, standing at the door, his broad-brimmed hat pushed back on to the nape of his neck, and his bundle of sheepskins on his shoulder.

"Good night, my children," said he; "good night; always at work?"

"Yes, Master Hullin, as you see," replied Jeanne, with a smile. "If one had nothing to do, life would be very tedious."

"True, my pretty girl, true; there is nothing like work to give you those fresh cheeks and large bright eyes."

Jeanne was going to reply when the inner door opened, and Catherine Lefèvre entered, casting a searching look at Hullin as if to guess beforehand the news he brought.

"Well, Jean-Claude, you are back again."

"Yes, Catherine. There is both good and bad news."

They went into the inner room, a high and spacious apartment, wainscoted to the very ceiling, with its cupboards of old oak with bright locks, its porcelain stove, its old clock marking the seconds in its walnut case, and its large arm-chair of embossed leather, which had been in use for ten generations. Jean-Claude never went into this room without thinking of Catherine's grandfather, whom he seemed still to see sitting in the shadow behind the stove.

"Well!" inquired the farm-mistress, offering a seat

to the sabct-maker, who had just placed his bundle on the table.

"Well, of Gaspard, the news is good; the lad is well. He has seen some hardships—so much the better; that is the making of a young man; but for the rest, Catherine, everything is very bad. War! war!"

He shook his head, and the old woman, with compressed lips, sat opposite to him, upright in her arm-chair, her eyes fixed, and listening eagerly.

"So everything is going wrong; we shall have wars at our very doors?"

"Yes, Catherine, from one day to the next we may expect to see the Allies in our mountains."

"I dreaded as much. I was sure of it; but speak, Jean-Claude."

Hullin then, with his elbows on his knees, his great red ears between his hands, and lowering his voice, began to relate all that he had seen: the defences round the town, the formation of batteries on the ramparts, the publication of the state of siege, the carts filled with the wounded in front of the church, his meeting with the old sergeant at the house of Wittman, and the renewal of the campaign. From time to time he made a pause, and the old farm-mistress would slowly wink her eyes, as though to fix the facts in her memory. When Jean-Claude came to the wounded, the good woman murmured, in a low voice, "Gaspard has escaped that."

Then at the close of this dismal story there was a long silence, and they both looked at each other without uttering a word.

What reflections, what bitter feelings passed through their minds!

After a few moments the old woman strove to rouse herself from these thoughts.

"You see, Jean-Claude," said she, in a calm, grave tone, "Yégof was not wrong."

"No doubt, no doubt he was not wrong," replied Hullin; "but what does that prove? A fool—a maniac, who goes from village to village—who comes down from Alsace, goes back to Lorraine, wanders right and left—it would be very surprising if he saw nothing, and if there should not be from time to time a mixture of truth in his mad sayings. All kinds of things get mixed up in his head, and then people think they understand what he does not understand himself. But it is not now a question of a fool's babblings, Catherine. The Austrians are here. The question is, whether we shall allow them to pass, or whether we shall have the courage to defend ourselves."

"To defend ourselves!" exclaimed the old woman, her pale cheeks flushing with excitement; "whether we shall have the courage to defend ourselves! You must forget, Hullin, that it is to me you are speaking. What! are we then unworthy of our forefathers? Did they not defend themselves, even to the death—men, women, and children?"

"Then you are for fighting, Catherine?"

"Yes, yes, as long as a morsel of flesh is left on my bones! Let them come! The old woman is prepared!"

Her long gray hair seemed to stand erect upon her head; her pale and withered cheeks trembled, and her eyes flashed fire.

She was really grand to look upon, as she stood, flushed and excited, like that aged Margareth of whom

Yégof had spoken. Hullin silently held out his hand to her, and smiled approvingly.

"Right!" said he; "right! The same as ever. You are like yourself, Catherine; your own true, brave self, as you stand there before me; but now be a little calm, and listen to me. We are going to fight, and with what means?"

"All and every means; all are good—hatchets, scythes, pitchforks."

"Truly, truly; but guns and bullets are best of all. We have guns: every dweller in the mountains hangs his own over his door; unluckily we have neither powder nor ball."

The old farm-mistress grew calm in a moment; pushing her gray locks back under her cap, she stood absently gazing straight before her, with a thoughtful look.

"Yes," she suddenly replied, in a sharp, short tone; "that is quite true; we have neither powder nor ball, but we soon will have. Marc Divès, the smuggler, has some. You shall go to him to-morrow from me. You will tell him that Catherine Lefèvre buys of him all his powder and all his bullets, that she pays him for them, that she will sell all her cattle, her farm, her land, all—all—to procure some. Do you understand, Hullin?"

"I understand. This is well done of you, Catherine; it is splendid!"

"Stuff! splendid and well done!" sharply retorted the old woman; "it is only natural that I should avenge myself! These Austrians, these Prussians, these red men, who have already half destroyed us—well! I would pay them back. I hate them, father to son. Now, you see! Buy the powder; and this wandering

beggar, this fool shall see if we will rebuild his castles!"

Hullin then perceived that she was still brooding over Yégof's stories; but seeing how exasperated she was, and that, besides, her having this notion contributed to the defence of the country, he made no remark on this subject, and simply said:

"Then, Catherine, it's agreed that I go to Divès to-morrow?"

"Yes: you will buy all his powder and his bullets. Some one must also go the round of all the villages in the mountain, to warn the people of what is going on, and arrange a signal with them for assembling in case of attack."

"Make your mind easy," said Jean-Claude; "I will undertake that, too."

They had both risen, and were proceeding towards the door. For the last half-hour the sounds in the kitchen had ceased: the farm people had gone to bed. The old woman placed her lamp in a corner of the hearth, and drew the bolts. Out of doors, it was cold and sharp, the air calm and clear. All the tops of the surrounding trees and the dark firs of the Jägerthal stood out against the sky in dark or luminous masses. Far off in the distance the shrill yelp of a fox resounded in the valley of the Blanru.

"Good night, Hullin," said Dame Lefèvre.

"Good night, Catherine."

Jean-Claude rapidly descended the steep hill, and the farm-mistress, after having looked after him for a second, went in and shut the door.

I leave you to imagine the joy of Louise, when she learnt that Gaspard was safe and sound. The poor

child, for the last two months, could hardly be said to have lived. Hullin was very careful not to show her the dark cloud that was slowly, but surely, moving towards them. All the night long he could hear her prattling to herself in her little room, talking low, as if congratulating herself upon her happiness, murmuring the name of Gaspard, and opening her drawers, her boxes ; no doubt in search of some of her treasures to which she might whisper of her love.

Thus the little bird, who has been drenched by the storm, while still shivering with cold and wet, begins to sing and to hop from branch to branch at the faint glimmer of sunshine.



CHAPTER V

WHEN Jean-Claude Hullin went the next morning in his shirt-sleeves to open his shutters, he saw all the neighbouring mountains—the Jägerthal, the Grosmann, the Donon—covered with snow. There is always something striking in this first aspect of winter, come upon the earth in our sleep; the old firs, the moss-covered rocks, still decked in verdure the evening before, and now sparkling with hoar-frost, fill the soul with an indefinable feeling of sadness. “Another year gone,” we say to ourselves; “another rough winter to go through, before the return of the flowers!” And people hasten to provide their winter clothing, and lay in their store of fuel. While your humble dwelling is pleasant inside with warmth and light, you hear out of doors, for the first time, the sparrows—the poor sparrows—chirruping mournfully, as they nestle, with ruffled plumage, under the thatch, “No breakfast this morning—no breakfast!”

Hullin put on his strong iron-bound and doubled soled shoes, and his thick overcoat.

He heard Louise walking about in her little room overhead.

“Louise!” he called out; “I am off!”

“What! are you going out again to-day?”

“Yes, my child, I must: I have not finished my business.”

Then, having put on his large, slouched hat, he went half-way up the stairs, and said, in a low tone :

“ You will not expect me very soon, my child : I have a good distance to go, so do not be anxious about me. If anyone asks you where I am gone, you can say, ‘ To Cousin Mathias’s, at Saverne.’ ”

“ Won’t you have your breakfast before you go ? ”

“ No ! I’ve put a crust of bread, and a little flask of brandy, in my pocket. Farewell, my child. Be happy. Dream of Gaspard.”

And, without waiting for fresh questions, he took his stick, and quitted the house, directing his steps towards the hill of the Bouleaux,* to the left of the village. After about a quarter of an hour’s brisk walking, he had passed it, and gained the footpath of the Three Fountains, which winds round by Falkenstein, with which a low stone wall runs parallel.

The first snows of winter, which are never long able to resist the damp of the valleys, were already beginning to melt away, and trickled slowly down the footpath. Hullin mounted the wall to make his footing surer, and as he chanced, by accident, to cast his eyes down on the village, at a distance of within two gun-shots, he saw the housewives busily engaged in sweeping the snow away from the front of their houses, whilst some old men, standing by, wished them good morning as they smoked their first pipe in their doorways. This profound calm, in presence of the thoughts that were stirring within him, moved him deeply ; he continued on his way in a thoughtful mood, saying to himself : “ How quietly and tranquilly their life flows on ! They have no doubts and fears for the future ; and yet, but a

* The Birch Trees.

few days, and what clamour, what strife, may rend the air !”

As the first thing necessary was to procure the powder, Catherine Lefèvre had very naturally cast her eyes upon Marc Divès, the smuggler, and his virtuous spouse, Hexe-Baizel.

These people lived on the other side of the Falkenstein, under the very shadow of the old ruinous *burg*. They had hollowed out for themselves in the rock a very convenient cavern which had only one entrance, and two apertures to admit light; but which, if report spoke true, had another outlet, leading to old subterranean passages of great extent. This the custom-house officers had never been able to discover, in spite of numberless visits paid with that object in view. Jean-Claude and Marc Divès had known each other from childhood—had rambled together as boys in search of hawks’ and owls’ nests, and, in after life, they met each other at least once nearly every week, at the great sawpits of the Valtin. Jean-Claude, therefore, believed himself sure of the smuggler, but he was not quite so certain of Madame Hexe-Baizel, a very discreet person, and who would not, perhaps, be greatly taken with the prospect of strife and warfare. “At any rate,” said he, as he jogged steadily along, “we shall soon see.”

He had lit his pipe, and from time to time he turned slowly round to gaze upon the broad landscape, whose limits kept growing wider and wider.

Nothing more beautiful in nature than these wooded mountains, rising one above the other in the pale heavens—these vast plains, stretching out of sight, all white with snow—these black ravines, half hidden

among the woods, with their sluggish streams gurgling slowly over the smooth pebbles at the bottom.

And then the silence—that grand solemn silence of winter—the half-melted snow falling noiselessly from the tops of the tall firs on to the lower branches, gently bending beneath their weight; the birds of prey whirling in pairs over the forest, uttering their shrill war-cry. All this must be seen, for it cannot be described!

About an hour after he had left the village of Charmes, Hullin, climbing the summit of the steep mountain, reached the foot of rock of the Arbousiers. All around this huge mass of granite extends a sort of rocky terrace, three or four feet wide. This narrow footway, canopied by the tall tops of the slender mountain firs, looks dangerous, but it is safe; unless attacked by giddiness, you can walk along it without risk. Above rises the rocky and ruinous archway of the cavern.

Jean-Claude drew near the smuggler's retreat. He stopped a few moments on the terrace, put his pipe back in his pocket, then advanced along the path, which describes a half circle, and ends on the other side by a sudden gap.

At the very end, and almost on the edge of this gap, he perceived the two lattices of the cave, and the half-opened doorway, in front of which an immense heap of dung was piled.

At the same moment Hexe-Baizel made her appearance, sweeping the dung into the abyss with a large besom made of green broom. She was a little, withered woman, with red tangled locks, hollow cheeks, sharp nose, small eyes sparkling like stars, pinched mouth, amply

furnished with very white teeth, and a ruddy complexion. As to her costume, it was composed of a very short and very dirty woollen petticoat, a coarse chemise, tolerably clean; her small, muscular arms, covered with a sort of yellow down, were bare to the elbows, in spite of the excessive cold of the atmosphere at this height. To complete her costume, the only coverings to her feet were a pair of old worn-out shoes, down at the heel.

"Ah! good morrow, Hexe-Baizel," exclaimed Jean-Claude, in a tone of mocking good humour. "You are as fat and comely as ever—I see, happy and contented! It does one good to see you."

Hexe-Baizel had started at the first sound of Jean-Claude's voice like a weasel caught in a trap; her red hair seemed to stand on end, and her little sparkling eyes flashed fire; but she instantly recovered herself, and exclaimed, in a short, sharp tone, as if speaking to herself:

"Hullin! the shoemaker! what does he want?"

"I have come to see my friend Marc, fair Hexe-Baizel," replied Jean-Claude; "we have some business to settle."

"What business?"

"Ah! that is our affair. Come, let me go in, that I may speak to him."

"Marc is asleep."

"Well, then, he must be awakened, for time presses."

So saying, Hullin stooped under the door-way, and entered a cavern, whose vaulted roof, instead of being round, was formed in irregular curves, furrowed with crevices. Quite close to the entrance, and two feet from the ground, the rock made a sort of natural hearth; on this hearth a few lumps of coal and some

jumper branches were burning. All Hexe-Baizel's cooking utensils consisted of a copper saucepan, an earthenware porringer, two cracked plates, and three or four pewter spoons; all her furniture of a wooden bench, a woodcutter's hatchet, a salt-box hung against the rock, and her large besom made of green broom. To the left of this kitchen was another cavern, with an uneven-shaped door, larger at the bottom than the top, and which shut by means of two planks and a cross-beam.

"Well, where is Marc?" said Hullin, as he seated himself beside the hearth.

"I've told you already he is asleep. He came home very late yesterday. My man must have his rest; do you understand?"

"I understand very well, Hexe-Baizel; but I've no time to wait."

"Begone, then."

"It's very easy to say 'Begone,' only I don't want to go. I've not come a whole league to go back with my hands in my pockets."

"Is that you, Hullin?" broke in a rough voice, issuing from the inner cave.

"Yes, Marc."

"Oh! here I am."

A sound like the rustling of straw was heard, then the wooden outworks were withdrawn, and a huge frame, three feet broad from one shoulder to the other, lean, bony, bent, the neck and ears of the colour of brickdust, and with thick, stubbly, brown hair, appeared, stooping through the opening, and Marc Divès, yawning and stretching his long arms with a stifled sigh, stood before Hullin.

At first sight, the aspect of Marc Divès seemed pacific enough; his broad and low forehead, short, curly hair, which came down in a point almost to his eyebrows, leaving his temples bare, his straight and pointed nose, and long chin, and, above all, the calm expression of his brown eyes, would have caused him to be classed rather among the ruminating than a fiercer tribe of animals; but those who so thought would have done wrong. Reports ran throughout the country that Marc Divès, in the event of an attack by the revenue officers, did not scruple to make use of his hatchet or carbine in case of need, and many serious accidents that had befallen the excise collectors were laid to his charge; but the proofs were always wanting, the smuggler, thanks to his profound knowledge of all the defiles of the mountain, and of every cross-road from Dagsburg to Sarrebrück, and from Raon-L'Etape to Bâle, in Switzerland, always contriving to put himself at fifteen leagues' distance from the place where an unlucky encounter had taken place. And then he had such a simple manner about him, and those who spread those evil reports were always sure to come to a bad end, which proves the justice of Providence in this world.

"If you'll believe me, Hullin," said Marc, after he had come out of his hole, "I was thinking of you only yesterday evening, and if you had not come I should have gone straight to the sawpits of the Valtin on purpose to meet you. Sit down; Hexe-Baizel, give Hullin a chair."

He then seated himself on the hearth, with his back to the fire, and his face to the open door, through which breathed the gales of Alsace and of Switzerland.

Through this opening, too, a magnificent prospect might be enjoyed; you would have styled it a regular picture, framed in the rock, but still an immense picture, embracing the whole valley of the Rhine, and beyond that the mountains dissolving far in the hazy distance. And, to crown all, there was the fresh breeze of the mountain, and the bright fire, which, flickering and dancing in this owls' nest, was a pleasant sight to turn to, with its ruddy glow, forming such a striking contrast with the pale blue tinge of the distant scenery.

"Marc," said Hullin, after a moment's silence, "may I speak before your wife?"

"She and I are only one."

"Well, then, I have come here to buy of you powder and shot."

"To shoot hares, I suppose," said the smuggler, with a knowing wink.

"No; to fight the Germans and Russians."

There was a moment's silence.

"And you will want a great deal of powder and shot?"

"All you can supply me with."

"I can supply you to-day with three thousand francs' worth," said the smuggler.

"I will take it."

"And as much more in a week's time," added Marc, with the same calm tone and thoughtful eye.

"I will take it."

"You will take it!" exclaimed Hexe-Baizel; "you will take it! No doubt; but who's to pay for it?"

"Be silent!" said Marc, in a harsh tone; "Hullin shall have it; his word is enough for me."

Then, extending his huge hand, with a cordial expres-

sion:—"Jean-Claude, here is my hand; the powder and shot are yours; but I should like to have the spending of my share of them, you understand?"

"Yes, Marc; and one thing more. I purpose paying you at once."

"He is going to pay!" said Hexe-Baizel; "you hear?"

"Yes; I'm not deaf! Baizel, go and fetch us a bottle of *brimbelle-wasser*; that'll warm our hearts a bit. I am rejoiced at what Hullin has just told me. Those beggars of *kaiserliks* will not have it quite so much their own way as I thought. It seems we are going to defend ourselves, and with a good will."

"Yes, with a right good will."

"And there are those who will pay for it?"

"It is Catherine Lefèvre who will pay for it, and it is she who has sent me," said Hullin.

Then Marc Divès rose, and in a solemn voice, and with his hand extended towards the summits of the steep mountains, he exclaimed:—"She is a woman as grand and as firm as that rock down below there, the Oxenstein, the largest I ever saw in my life. I drink to her health. Drink you, too, Jean-Claude."

Hullin drank, as did also the old woman

"And now there is nothing more to be said," exclaimed Divès; "but, hark ye, Hullin; you must not fancy this will be an easy matter; all the hunters, all the *ségares*,* all the *schlittours*, all the woodcutters of the mountain, will not be too many for the work that is to be done. I have just come from the other side of the Rhine. There are Russians, Austrians, Bavarians, Prussians, Cossacks, Hussars. There are—

* Workers in a sawpit.

why, the country swarms with them. They blacken the face of the land ; they camp in the plains, in the valleys, on the heights, in the cities, in the open air, everywhere ; they are everywhere."

At this moment a sharp cry resounded through the air.

"It is a buzzard on the wing," said Marc, interrupting himself.

But at the same moment a dark shadow passed over the rock. A cloud of greenfinches flew over the abyss, and hundreds of buzzards and hawks were seen taking their rapid, angular flight overhead, uttering harsh cries to frighten their prey, while the whole seemed struggling together in a compact mass that looked motionless by reason of its density. The regular movement of these thousands of wings produced in the stillness a sound like that of dead leaves stirred by the north wind.

"That is the flight of the greenfinches of Ardennes," said Hullin.

"Yes ; it is their last passage. The earth is covered with snow, and the seed lies buried in its bosom. Well, look now ; there are more men down below there than those birds can number. No matter, Jean-Claude, we will beat them, provided everyone puts his shoulder to the wheel. Hexe-Baizel, light the lantern ; I will show Hullin our stores of powder and shot."

Hexe-Baizel, at this information, could not restrain a grimace.

"No one, for twenty years," said she, "has ever entered the cave. He can surely believe us on our word. We take his word that he is going to pay us. I shall not light the lantern, no !"

Marc, without a word, stretched out his hand, and seized a thick cudgel from the wood pile close by; then the old woman, bristling with rage, disappeared into the inner hole like a ferret, and came a few seconds after with a great horn lantern, which Divès quietly lit at the blazing hearth.

“Baizel,” said the smuggler, replacing the stick in the corner, “you should know that Jean-Claude is the old friend of my childhood, and that I put a deal more trust in him than in you, old polecat; for if you were not afraid of being hung the same day as me, I should have dangled at the end of a rope long ago. Come, Hullin, follow me.”

They went out, and the smuggler, turning to the left, went straight towards the gap which was yawning on the very edge of the Valtin, at the height of two hundred feet in the air. He put aside the foliage of a small oak growing up from below, strode over it, and disappeared as if suddenly launched into the abyss below. Jean-Claude shuddered; but almost immediately afterwards he saw, against the ledge of the rock, the head of Divès, who called to him:

“Hullin, place your hand to the left, you will find a hole; put your foot out boldly, you will feel a step, and then turn upon your heel.”

Master Jean-Claude obeyed, not without trembling; he felt the hole in the rock, he encountered the step, and taking a half-turn, he found himself face to face with his companion, in a sort of arched niche, abutting formerly, no doubt, on some postern gate. At the bottom of the niche was a low vault.

“How on earth did you discover that?” exclaimed Hullin, quite thunderstruck.

“While looking for nests, thirty-five years ago. I was one day on the rock, and I often noticed, coming in and out of this nook, a *grand duke* and its mate, two magnificent birds, the head as large as my fist, and the wings six feet across. I heard the cry of their little ones, and I said to myself: ‘They are near the cavern, at the end of the terrace. If I could take just one turn a little beyond the gap, I should have them!’ By means of looking and leaning over, I managed to see the corner of a step just above the precipice. I found a strong holly tree beside it. I grasped the tree, put out my leg, and there I was! What a fight, Hullin! the old bird and his mate were ready to tear my eyes out. Luckily, it was daylight. They flew at me like fighting-cocks, pecking at me, and screaming horribly all the while; but the sun dazzled them. I kicked them with all my might. At last they fell down stunned over the top of that old fir tree down below there; and all the jays round about, the thrushes, the greenfinches, the tomtits, kept flying round about them till night-time, to strip them of their feathers. You can’t imagine, Jean-Claude, the heap of bones, of skins of rats, leverets, of skeletons of all sorts, that I found in this nook. It was a regular pest-house. I lost no time in clearing it all out, and discovered this narrow passage. I must tell you there were two young ones. The first thing I did was to wring their necks, and stuff them into my bag; that done, I entered very quietly, and you shall see what I found. Come on.”

They then crept along beneath the narrow and low vault formed by enormous blocks of red stone, and through which the lantern they carried cast a flickering light.

At the end of about thirty feet, a vast cavern of circular form, hollowed out of the solid rock, appeared before Hullin. At the bottom were ranged in pyramids about fifty little barrels, and at the sides a great number of bars of lead and bags of tobacco, with the strong odour of which the air was filled.

Marc left his lantern at the entrance of the vault, and now stood looking proudly on his den, while a smile curled his lips.

"This is what I found," said he; "the cave was empty, only in the middle of it there was the carcase of a beast as white as snow—no doubt some fox who had died there of old age—the beggar had found out the passage before me. He slept here soundly enough; who the devil would ever have thought of following him? At that time, Jean-Claude, I was only twelve years old. The thought instantly struck me that some day or other this hiding-place might be useful to me. I did not then know for what; but, in after-times, when I had my first bouts of smuggling at Landau, Kiel, and Bâle with Jacob Zimmer, and when all the custom-house officers were at my heels, the idea of my old cavern began to haunt me day and night. I had made the acquaintance of Hexe-Baizel, who was at that time servant at the farm of Bois-de-Chênes, where Catherine's father then lived. She brought me twenty-five louis as her marriage portion, and we came and settled ourselves in our cavern of Arbousiers."

Divès was silent, and Hullin, after musing a moment, said: "You are very fond of this hole, then, Marc?"

"Fond of it? I'll tell you what, I wouldn't change it for the finest house in Strasburg, with two thousand ivres a year to boot. For twenty-three years have I

hidden my merchandize here ; sugar, coffee, gunpowder, tobacco, brandy, all finds its way here. I have eight horses always on the road."

"But you don't enjoy yourself."

"I don't enjoy myself! You think, then, it's nothing to trick the gendarmes, the custom-house officers, the excise ; to spite them, gull them, hear them say everywhere, 'That beggar of a Marc, what a cunning rogue it is! what a dance he leads you! he sets the law and all its agents at defiance;' and so on, and so on. He! he! he! I'll answer for it, that it's the greatest pleasure in life. And then, the people all round adore you; I sell them everything at half-price. You can afford to be good to the poor, and keep your own belly warm."

"But what danger, what risks!"

"Bah! not an exciseman in the world will ever think of passing that gap."

"I believe you!" thought Hullin, as he reflected that he should have to make his way back over the precipice.

"But for all that," continued Marc, "you are not altogether wrong, Jean-Claude. In the beginning, when I had to come here with one of those little barrels on my shoulder, I used to sweat great drops of perspiration ; but I am used to it now."

"And if your foot were to slip?"

"Well then all would be over. As well die spitted on a fir-tree as lie coughing whole days and nights upon a mattrass."

Divès then held up his lantern, and, by its light, the barrels of gunpowder, piled one upon another up to the roof of the vault, were plainly seen.

"It is the best English gunpowder," said he; "it flows like grains of silver over the hand, and makes a splendid charge. You don't want much of it; a thimbleful's enough. And here's some lead without the smallest particle of tin. From this very evening, Hexe-Baizel shall begin to cast bullets; she's a good hand at that—you will see."

They were preparing to return the same way they came, when all of a sudden they were startled by a confused humming sound of talking at no great distance from them. Marc blew out his lantern, and they remained plunged in darkness.

"There is some one walking above there," whispered the smuggler; "who the deuce has managed to climb up the Falkenstein this snowy weather?"

They listened in breathless silence, and with their eyes fixed on a pale streak of light which streamed through a narrow fissure at the end of the cavern. Around this cleft grew some shrubs sparkling with hoar frost, while higher up might be perceived the top of an old wall. As they stood thus anxiously watching in the most profound silence, there suddenly appeared at the foot of the wall a huge head covered with long matted hair, the sharp, lean face ending in a red pointed beard, the sharply-cut profile standing out in strong relief against the white wintry sky.

"It is the King of Diamonds," said Marc, with a laugh.

"Poor devil!" said Hullin, in a grave tone; "he has come to ramble about his castle, with his bare feet on the ice, and his tin crown on his head! Stay! see! he is speaking; he is giving his orders to his knights, to his court; he extends his sceptre to the north and to the

south—all is his; he is lord of heaven and earth! Poor devil! only to see him with his thin drawers and his old sheepskin on his back, makes me shiver with cold.”

“Yes, Jean-Claude, and me, too; it makes me feel like a burgomaster, or mayor of a village, with his round paunch and fat puffy cheeks, who says to himself: ‘Me, I am Hans-Aden; I have ten acres of beautiful meadows, I have two houses, I have a vine, my orchard, my garden, hum! hum! I’ve this, and I’ve that!’ The next day a little touch of colic carries him off, and—good bye! Ah, the fools! the fools! who is there that is not a fool? Come along, Hullin, the very sight of that poor fellow babbling to the wind, and his raven, who croaks of famine, makes my teeth chatter.”

As they came out into the open day, Hullin was almost dazzled by the sudden change from the thick darkness. Fortunately, the tall stature of his companion, standing upright before him, preserved him from an attack of giddiness.

“Step firmly,” said Marc; “imitate me—your right hand in the hole, the right foot forward on the step, one half turn round—here we are!”

They returned to the kitchen, where Hexe-Baizel told them that Yégof was in the ruins of the old *burg*.

“We know it,” replied Marc; “we have just seen him taking the air up above there; every one to his taste.”

At the same instant, the raven, Hans, hovering over the abyss, passed in front of the door, uttering a hoarse cry; they heard the rustling of the frost-covered bushes, and the fool appeared before them on the terrace. His

looks were wild and haggard, and, casting a glance at the hearth, he exclaimed :

“ Marc Divès, you must give up this place as soon as possible. I warn you ; I am weary of this disorder. The fortifications of my domains must be free. I will not suffer vermin to harbour in them.”

Then perceiving Jean-Claude his brow grew clear.

“ You here, Hullin ! ” said he. “ Can it be, that you are at length wise enough to accept the proposals I have deigned to make you ? Do you feel that an alliance such as mine is the sole means of saving you from the total destruction of your race ? If it be so, I congratulate you ; you have shown more good sense than I expected of you.”

Hullin could not help laughing.

“ No, Yégof, no ; Heaven has not yet enlightened me enough,” said he, “ for me to accept the honour you wish to do me ; besides, Louise is not yet of an age to marry.”

The fool had grown grave and gloomy again. Standing on the edge of the terrace, with his back to the abyss, he seemed on his own territory, and his raven, fluttering from right to left, had no power to disturb him. He raised his sceptre, knit his brow, and exclaimed :

“ Then now, for the second time, Hullin, I reiterate my demand ; and for the second time you dare to refuse me ! Now I will renew it yet once more—once more, do you hear ? and then let destiny be fulfilled ! ”

And so, turning gravely on his heel, his head high and erect, in spite of the extreme rapidity of the descent, he vanished quickly from their sight.

Hullin, Marc Divès, and even Hexé-Baizel herself, uttered loud peals of laughter.

"He is a great fool," said Hexe-Baizel.

"I think you are not altogether wrong," replied the smuggler. "That poor Yégof is certainly out of his mind. But never mind that now. Baizel, listen well to me; you must begin to cast bullets of all sizes; for my part, I am going to set out for Switzerland. In a week at the latest, the rest of our ammunition will be here. Give me my boots."

Then tying round his neck a thick red woollen comforter, he took down from the wall one of those cloaks of dark green such as shepherds wear, threw it over his shoulders, pulled his old slouched hat over his brows, took a stout cudgel, and exclaimed:

"Do not forget what I have just told you, old woman, or beware. Forward, Jean-Claude!"

Hullin followed him out upon the terrace without saying good-bye to Hexe-Baizel, who, for her part, did not even deign to come to the door to see them depart. As soon as they had arrived at the foot of the rock, Marc Divès stopped, and said:

"You are going into all the villages of the mountain, are you not, Hullin?"

"Yes, that is the first thing to be done; I must warn the woodcutters, the charcoal-burners, the barge-men of what is going on."

"Without doubt. Do not forget Materne of Hengst and his two boys, Labarbe of Dagsburg, Jérôme of Saint-Quirin. Tell them that there will be powder and ball; that we are in it heart and soul, Catherine Lefèvre, I, Marc Divès, and all the honest people of the country."

"Make your mind easy, Marc; I know my men."

"Then good-bye for the present."

They wrung each other's hands and parted.

The smuggler took the path to the right, towards the Donon, Hullin that to the left, towards the Sarre.

They were both proceeding on their way at a good pace when Hullin called to his comrade :

“Halloo ! Marc, as you pass Catherine Lefèvre's, tell her that all goes well, and that I am gone to the villages in the mountain.”

The other answered by a sign of his head that he understood, and then both continued their way.



CHAPTER VI.

AN extraordinary agitation prevailed at this time over all the line of the Vosges ; the report of an expected invasion spread from village to village, even to the very farms and cottages of the Hengst and the Nideck. The hawkers, the carriers, the tinkers, all the floating population that roves incessantly from the mountain to the plain, and from the plain to the mountain, brought every day from Alsace and the borders of the Rhine a lot of strange news.

“Every place,” said these folks, “is being put in a state of defence ; foraging parties are constantly engaged in provisioning them with corn and meat. The roads from Metz, from Nancy, from Huningen, and from Strasbourg, are filled with convoys. In every direction you meet waggons full of ammunition, cavalry, infantry, artillery, all hurrying to their posts. Marshal Victor, with his twelve thousand men, is already engaged in keeping the road to Saverne, but the draw-bridges are always raised from seven o’clock every evening till eight the next morning.”

Every one was of opinion that all this boded no good. Nevertheless, if many felt serious alarm at the near prospect of war, if old women lifted their hands to heaven and prayed to all the saints in the calendar, the greater number thought only of the means of defence.

Under such circumstances, Jean-Claude Hullin, you may be sure, was well received everywhere.

That very day, about five o'clock in the evening, he reached the summit of the Hengst, and stopped at the dwelling of the patriarch of the forest rangers, old Materne. It was there that he passed the night; for, in winter time, the days are short and the roads bad. Materne promised to undertake the charge of the defile of the Zorn with his two sons, Kasper and Frantz, and to reply to the first signal that should be made to him from the Falkenstein.

The next day Jean-Claude repaired betimes to Dagsburg, to consult with his friend Labarbe, the wood-cutter. They went together to visit the neighbouring hamlets, to try and inspire every heart with the love of their country; and the day following, Labarbe accompanied Hullin to the house of the Anabaptist, Christ-Nickel, the farmer of Painbach, a respectable and very sensible man, but whom they could not succeed in winning over to their glorious enterprise. Christ-Nickel had but one reply to every observation:

"It is right, it is just; but the Gospel says, 'Put up thy sword in its place; he who slays with the sword shall perish by the sword.'" He promised them, however, his best wishes for the good cause; this was all they could obtain.

They went from thence to Walsch, to exchange firm handgrips with Daniel Hirsch, an old naval gunner, who promised them his support, and that of all the people of his commonalty. At this place Labarbe left Jean-Claude to continue his way alone. For a whole week longer he did nothing but work his way to and from the mountain, from Soldatenthal to Léonsberg, to Meienthâl, to Abresch-

willer, Voyer, Loëttenbach, Cirey, Petit-Mont, Saint-Sauveur, and on the ninth day he found himself at the house of the shoemaker, Jérôme, at Saint-Quirin. Together they visited the defile of the Blanru, after which Hullin, satisfied with his journey and its results, at length took his way back to the village.

He had proceeded for about two hours at a steady pace, picturing to himself camp life, the bivouac, the attack, the marches and countermarches, all the episodes in a soldier's life which filled him with enthusiasm, when afar off, still at a great distance, he discovered in the pale twilight the hamlet of Charmes, and his own little modest tenement, from the chimney of which rose a wreath of smoke so thin as to be almost imperceptible, the little gardens surrounded with wooden palings, the shingly roofs, and, to the left, the large farm of Bois-de-Chênes, with the sawpit of the Valtin at the other end half-hidden in the already dark ravine.

Then, suddenly, and without knowing why, a deep sadness fell upon him.

He relaxed his pace, as he mused upon the calm, peaceful life that he was about to lose, perhaps for ever ; of his own little room, so cosy in winter, so fresh and gay in spring, when he threw open the casements, and inhaled the fresh breeze from the woods ; of the drowsy ticking of the old clock, and, above all, of Louise, his dear little Louise, spinning quietly in the twilight, with downcast eyelids, and singing some old song in her clear, pure voice in the quiet evening hour, when a feeling of peace and repose stole over them both. This recollection came upon him so forcibly that the smallest objects, every humble implement of his own trade, the long, shining straps, the short-handled hatchet, the mallets,

the little stove, the old cupboard, the glazed earthen porringers, the antique image of Saint Michael nailed to the wall, the old canopied bed at the end of the alcove, the bench, the trunk, the little copper lamp—all came back to his mind like a living picture, and the tears stood in his eyes.

But it was, above all, Louise, his beloved child, whom he most pitied. What tears would she not shed! how she would pray of him to give up the thoughts of fighting! how she would cling about his neck, saying, “Oh! do not leave me, dear, dear father! Oh! I will love you so! Oh! say you will not leave me!”

And the honest fellow saw her beautiful eyes bathed in tears; he felt her arms about his neck. For a moment the idea came into his head to deceive her, to make her believe something else—no matter what—to account for his absence, and console her; but such modes of dealing were foreign to his nature, and he grew more and more sad.

As he was passing by the farm of Bois-de-Chênes, he went in to tell Catherine Lefèvre that all was going well, and that the mountaineers only awaited the signal.

A quarter of an hour later, Master Jean-Claude, descending the footpath to the house, stood opposite his own modest dwelling.

CHAPTER VII.

BEFORE pushing open the creaking door, the idea struck Jean-Claude to see what Louise was doing at that moment. So he took a peep through the casement into the little room, and there he saw Louise standing by the curtains in the alcove ; she seemed very busily employed in folding and unfolding some clothes spread out upon the bed. Her sweet face beamed with happiness, and her large blue eyes shone with a sort of enthusiasm ; she was speaking aloud to herself at the same time. Hullin listened, but a cart that happened to be passing just at that moment prevented his hearing what she said.

So, taking his resolution boldly, he entered, saying, in a firm voice : " Well, Louise, here I am back again."

In an instant, the young girl, radiant with joy, and bounding like a fawn, was in his arms.

" Ah ! it is you, father dear ; I was expecting you. Oh ! what a time you have been away, but here you are at last !"

" Because, my child," replied the brave man, in a tone a trifle less firm, placing his stick behind the door, and his hat upon the table ; " because——"

He could say no more.

" Oh ! yes, yes, because you have been to see our

friends," said Louise, with a smile; "I know all; Mother Lefèvre has told me everything."

"What! you know all, and yet you are the same as usual? So much the better; it shows your good sense. And I, who was dreading to see your tears!"

"Tears! and why, Father Jean-Claude? That shows you do not know me; you shall find I have courage."

The resolute air with which she uttered these words made Hullin smile; but the smile very quickly vanished when she added: "We are going to war, we are going to fight, we are going into the mountain."

"Heyday! hoity-toity! 'We are going, we are going!' what's all this?" exclaimed the good man, quite wonderstruck.

"Yes. Are we not going, then?" said she, in a tone of regret.

"Well—that is to say—I shall have to leave you for some time, my child."

"To leave me! Oh! no. I shall go with you, that's settled. Stay, see, my little bundle is ready already, and I am preparing yours. Don't you trouble yourself about anything; leave it all to me, and it will be all right."

Hullin could not recover from his surprise.

"But, Louise," he exclaimed, "you cannot be thinking of it. Only consider. Why, you would have to pass whole nights out of doors, marching, running; and then the cold, the snow, and, above all, the firing! It cannot be."

"Pray, now," said the young girl, in a voice that shook with emotion, as she threw herself into his arms, "don't make me unhappy; you are jesting with your little Louise; you cannot mean to leave her!"

"But you will be much better here. You will be warm and comfortable. You shall hear from me every day."

"No, no ; I will not stay behind ; I will go with you. I don't mind the cold. I've been shut up too long ; I want a little change of air, too. The birds don't stay at home. The robin redbreasts are out of doors all the winter long. Did I not have to bear the cold when I was quite a little thing, and hunger, too?"

She stamped impatiently with her foot, and then, for the third time, threw her arms round Jean-Claude's neck.

"Come, Papa Hullin," said she, in a coaxing voice, "Mother Lefèvre has said 'Yes.' Will you be less kind than she? Ah! if you but knew how I love you!"

The honest fellow, touched beyond measure, had sat himself down, and turned aside his head to hide his emotion and avoid her persuasive caresses.

"Oh! how unkind and naughty you are to-day, Papa Jean-Claude!"

"It is for your sake, my child."

"So much the worse, then, for I shall run away ; I shall run after you. The cold, indeed! What do I care for the cold? And if you are wounded, and if you ask to see your little Louise for the last time, and she is not there close to you, to tend you, to love you to the last? Oh! you must think me very hard-hearted!"

She sobbed and cried. Hullin could restrain himself no longer.

"Is it really true that Mother Lefèvre consents?" he asked.

"Oh! yes; oh! yes; she told me so. She said, 'Try

to persuade Papa Jean-Claude ; for my part, I ask no better ; I am quite willing.' ”

“ In that case, what can I do against you both ? You shall come with us. It is settled. ”

There was then a shriek of joy that made the whole house echo.

“ Oh ! how good and kind you are ! ” and with a brush of the hand the tears were dried up.

“ We are going away, to ramble over the mountains, and make war, ” was now the joyful cry.

“ Ha ! ” said Hullin, with a shake of the head ; “ I see now you are still the same little *heimathslôs* as ever. As well try and tame a swallow. ” Then, drawing her to his knee : “ Ah ! Louise, ” said he, “ it is now twelve years since I found you in the snow ; you were quite blue with the cold, poor little thing ! And when we got home to the little cabin, and the warm fire brought you gently round, the first thing you did was to smile upon me. And from that time I have always done whatever you wanted. With that smile you have led me by the nose. ”

Then Louise began to smile upon him again, and they embraced each other very lovingly.

“ And now, then, let us look at the bundles, ” said the good man with a sigh. “ Are they well packed up, eh, child ? ”

He approached the bed, and stood quite surprised to see his warm clothing, his flannel waistcoats, all well brushed, well folded, and well packed up. Then came Louise's bundle, with her best frocks, her petticoats and thick shoes, all in good order. He could not help laughing at last, and exclaiming :

“ Oh ! *heimathslôs*, *heimathslôs* ! there are none like

you for packing up, when once you've set your mind upon it!"

Louise smiled.

"You are pleased?"

"I must be so! But all this time, while you have been so busy about this work, you never thought, I suppose, of preparing my supper?"

"Oh! that is soon done! I did not know, Papa Jean-Claude, that you were coming back this evening."

"That is true, my child. Cook me, then, something—no matter what, but quickly, for I've a good appetite. In the meanwhile, I'll smoke a pipe."

He seated himself in his old corner, and lit his pipe in an absent, thoughtful manner. Louise bustled about, right and left, like a frisky sprite, now stirring the fire, now breaking eggs into the pan, and tossing up an omelet in the twinkling of an eye. Never had she seemed so gay, so smiling, so pretty. Hullin, with his elbow on the table, his cheek in his hand, sat gravely watching her, and thinking what will, firmness, and resolution there was in that fragile creature, light as a fairy, and determined as a hussar. In another moment she had brought him his omelet on a large-patterned dish, along with the bread, a glass and bottle.

"Now then, Papa Jean-Claude, feast away."

She watched him fondly as he ate his meal.

The fire blazed brightly in the stove, reflecting its warm light on the low rafters, the wooden staircase just visible in the gloom, the great bed at the bottom of the alcove, all the little details of the home so often cheered by the gay humour of the shoemaker, the songs of his daughter, and the pleasant bustle of work. And all

this Louise could quit without a sigh of regret; she thought of nothing but the woods, the snowy path across the endless chain of mountains from their village to Switzerland, and farther still. Ah! Master Jean-Claude had, indeed, good reason to exclaim, "*Heimathslós! Heimathslós!*" The swallow cannot be tamed!—she needs the open air, the boundless sky, the eternal voyage over the wide expanse of waters! She fears neither storm nor wind, nor torrents of rain, as the hour of departure approaches. Henceforth, she has but one thought, one sigh, one cry: "On! on!"

The meal over, Hullin rose, and said to his daughter:

"I am tired, my child; kiss me, and let us go to bed."

"Yes; but don't forget to wake me, Papa Jean-Claude, if you go before daybreak."

"Be easy. It's settled; you shall come with us."

Then, as he looked after her as she ascended the narrow wooden staircase, and disappeared within her own little attic—"Is she afraid of being left alone in the nest?" said he to himself.

Out of doors the silence was so great that it might almost be said to be heard. The village clock had just struck eleven. The good man sat down to take off his shoes. Just at that moment his eye happened to fall upon his gun, suspended over the door. He took it down, wiped it slowly, and tried the lock. He had thrown his whole soul into the business before him.

"There's work in the old gun still," he murmured to himself; and then added in a grave voice:

"It's droll, it's droll; the last time I used it—at Marengo—that's fourteen years ago—it seems to me but yesterday!"

The Great Invasion; or,

All at once, outside, the crisp snow crackled beneath a rapid footstep. He listened—there was some one. And almost immediately after he heard two little taps at the window. He ran and opened it. The rough head of Marc Divès, with his broad-brimmed hat quite stiff with frost, was visible in the gloom.

“Well, Marc, what news?”

“Have you warned the mountaineers—Materne, Jérôme, Labarbe?”

“Yes, all.”

“It is but just in time: the enemy has passed.”

“Passed?”

“Yes, along the whole line. I have come fifteen leagues through the snow since morning to tell you.”

“Good! we must give the signal—a large bonfire on the Falkenstein.”

Hullin was very pale. He put on his shoes again. Two minutes after, with his thick great-coat flung over his shoulders, and his stick in his hand, he softly opened the door, and was following Marc with hasty strides along the footpath of the Falkenstein.



CHAPTER VIII.

FROM midnight until six o'clock in the morning, a bright flame shone through the darkness on the summit of the Falkenstein, and the whole mountain was astir.

All the friends of Hullin, of Marc Divès, and of Dame Lefèvre, their legs encased in long gaiters, their old guns slung over their shoulders, were silently marching through the woods in the deep stillness of the night towards the gorges of the Valtin. The thought of the enemy crossing the plains of Alsace to come and surprise the dwellers in the defiles and mountains was uppermost in the minds of all. The tocsins of Dagsburg, of Abreschwiler, of Walsch, of Saint-Quirin, and of all the other villages, never ceased summoning the defenders of their country to arms.

You must now picture to yourself the Jägerthal at the foot of the old *burg* during the period of an extraordinary fall of snow, at that early hour of the morning when the tall shadows of the trees begin to be visible through the gloom, and the piercing cold of the night is lessened at the approach of dawn. You must picture to yourself the old saw-works, with its broad flat roof, its heavy wheel loaded with icicles, the low interior dimly lit up by a fire of fir-logs, whose glow is beginning to pale in the faint but clear light of early morning; and all around this fire is a confused jumble of seal-skin

caps, felt hats, dark profiles towering one above the other, and pressed close together like a living wall. Farther on, the whole length of the woods, in all the windings of the valley, other beacon-fires lighted up, in their crimson glow, groups of men and women huddling together in the snow.

The agitation was beginning to grow calmer. As the daylight grew stronger and stronger, people began to recognise each other.

“Holloa! cousin Daniel of Soldatenthal! you are here too, then?”

“Why, yes, as you see, Heinrich, and my wife, too.”

“What, Cousin Nanette! Why, where is she, then?”

“Down below there, near the great oak, by Uncle Hans’s fire.”

There were hearty hand-shakings everywhere. Some were giving vent to long and loud yawns, while others again were engaged in throwing sticks and logs of wood on the fire. Some were handing flasks about to each other, while others were drawing back from the circle round the fire to make room for their neighbours, who were shivering with the cold. But in spite of these various means of passing the time, signs of impatience began to show themselves among the crowd.

“But, I say,” exclaimed one, “we didn’t come here to warm the soles of our feet, did we? It’s time to look about, to understand each other.”

“Yes, yes,” was the general response; “let us come to an understanding; let us appoint our leaders.”

“No! everyone is not here yet. Look; there are some from Dagsburg and St. Quirin arriving now.”

In fact, as the day grew lighter, it served to show more and more people arriving by all the different paths

of the mountain. There were then already several hundred men in the valley: woodcutters, charcoal burners, watermen, without reckoning the women and children.

Nothing more picturesque can be imagined than this halt in the midst of the snow, in the deep defiles, surrounded by tall pines towering to the skies; to the right, valleys linked with each other, stretching away far out of sight; to the left, the cloud-capp'd ruins of Falkenstein. At a distance, they might have been taken for large flocks of cranes herding together for comfort, 'mid the snow and ice; but, on a nearer view, you could then behold these rough men, with beards bristling like the skin of the wild boar, stern eyes, broad square shoulders, and horny hands. Some among them, taller than the rest, belonged to that fiery red race with white skins, hairy to the very finger-ends, and strong enough to uproot oaks. Of this number were Materne of Hengst, and his two sons Frantz and Kasper. These stalwart fellows, all three armed with long carbines, from Inspruck, wearing long gaiters of blue cloth, with leather buttons, reaching high above the knee, a sort of tunic made of goat-skin, and their hats pushed to the very back of the head, had not even deigned to approach the fire. For the last hour they had been sitting together on the trunk of a felled tree by the river's edge, with watchful eye and keen scent, like hunters lying in ambush, with their feet on the snow.

From time to time the old man would say to his sons: "What are they shivering about, down there? I never knew a milder night for the season. It's like a spring night; the rivers are not even touched by the frost!"

All the forest-rangers of the country round, as they passed, gave them a hearty shake of the hand, and then closed in around them, so that they formed, in a manner, a band apart. These people spoke but little, being used to keeping silence for whole days and nights together, for fear of frightening the game.

Marc Divès, standing in the midst of another group, over which he towered by a whole head, was talking and gesticulating, and pointing sometimes to one point of the mountain, and sometimes to another. Opposite him stood the old shepherd, Lagarmitte, in his long grey smock, his wooden sheep-horn on his shoulder, listening open-mouthed, and from time to time silently bowing his grizzled head. For the most part, all the band seemed attentive; it was principally composed of woodcutters and bargemen, with whom the smuggler was almost daily brought into contact. Between the saw-pit and the first fire was seated the shoemaker, Jérôme of Saint-Quirin, a man of about fifty or sixty, with a long face, brown complexion, hollow eyes, big nose, a seal-skin cap pulled over his ears, and his yellow beard descending in a point to his waist. His hands, covered with thick woollen gloves, were leaning on an enormous knotted stick. He wore a long hooded cloak of coarse cloth, and might well have passed for a hermit. Any time a fresh rumour arose in some part or another, old Jérôme turned his head slowly round, and listened intently with knitted brows.

Jean Labarbe, with his elbow on his axe, sat passively looking on. He was a man with pale cheeks, aquiline nose, and thin lips. He had great influence over the men of Dagsburg, owing to his firmness and strength of mind. When everyone was shouting around him:

"We must deliberate; we can't stay doing nothing here!" he simply confined himself to saying: "Stop Hullin has not come yet, nor Catherine Lefèvre." Then all were silent, and contented themselves with looking eagerly towards the path leading from the Charmes.

The *ségare*,* Piorette, a little dry, lean, nervous man with black eye-brows meeting in front, the stump of a pipe between his lips, stood in front of his shed, watching, with an eye at once keen and thoughtful, the strange scene around him.

The general impatience was, however, increasing from minute to minute. Some village mayors, in square-cut coats and three-cornered hats, proceeded towards the sawpit, and called upon the men of their districts to deliberate. Very luckily, the cart of Catherine Lefèvre at length appeared in sight coming along the pathway, and immediately a thousand enthusiastic shouts rose on all sides.

"Here they are! here they are! they have come!"

There was a great stir and bustle among the crowd. The groups who were at a distance drew near, everyone came running up, and a sort of shudder of impatience seemed to run through the whole vast assembly. No sooner was a distinct view caught of the old farm-mistress, whip in hand, sitting on her truss of straw with Louise by her side, than cries and shouts rent the air of "Vive la France! Hurrah for Dame Catherine!"

A little way behind came Hullin, striding along across the meadow of the Eichmath, distributing hearty hand-

* Sawyer.

grips, his broad-brimmed hat at the back of his head, his gun slung over his shoulder.

"Good day, Daniel. Good day, Colon. Good day, good day."

"Ah! ha! it's growing warm, Hullin."

"Yes, yes; we shall hear the chestnuts burst in the fire this winter. Good day, old Jérôme; we are engaged in a great enterprise now."

"True, Jean-Claude. We must hope to accomplish it, with the blessing of God."

Catherine, as soon as she reached the sawpit, then told Labarbe to deposit on the ground a little keg of brandy which she had brought from the farm, and to borrow a jug from the sawyer in the shed.

A little while after, Hullin, coming up to the fire, met Materne and his two sons.

"You are late," said the old huntsman to him.

"Well, yes; what would you have? First, we had to descend from the Falkenstein, take our guns, and get the women-kind in marching order. However, here we are at last, so don't let us lose any more time. Give us a blast of your horn, Lagarmitte, to call all the people together. The first thing of all is to lay our plans, to appoint our leaders."

In an instant, Lagarmitte was blowing away at his long horn, with his cheeks inflated to his very ears, and the bands of men, who were still dispersed along the footpaths, and on the outskirts of the woods, hastened their steps to arrive in time. In a short time all the brave fellows were assembled in front of the sawpit.

Hullin, now grave and stern, mounted a heap of trunks of trees, and casting a look of serious meaning

on the crowd that surrounded him, said, in the midst of the deepest silence:—"The enemy crossed the Rhine the evening before last; he is now marching over the mountains to enter Lorraine; Strasbourg and Huningen are in a state of blockade. We must expect to see the Germans and the Russians in three or four days."

There was a general ringing cry of "Vive la France!"

"Yes, Vive la France!" replied Jean-Claude; "for if the Allies enter Paris, they will be masters of everything. They may, if they please, re-establish tithes, taxes, convents, privileges, and gibbets. If you wish to see all this again, you have only to let them pass by."

Words cannot describe the gloomy rage depicted in every countenance at these words.

"That is what I had to say to you," cried Hullin, sternly, and pale as death. "You are here, and you are here to fight."

"Yes, yes."

"That is well; but listen to me. I do not wish to take you unawares. There are fathers of families among you. We shall be one against ten, against fifty. We must expect to perish. Therefore, let such as have not well reflected on the matter, as have not the heart and the courage to do their duty to the very end, depart. We will have none of them. Everyone is free."

Then he was silent, and looked on all around him. Everyone stood still and motionless; so, with a still firmer voice, he continued:—"No one stirs. All, all are resolved to fight to the last. Well, it delights me to see that there is not a single dastard among us.

Now we must appoint a leader. In great perils, the first thing is order, discipline. The leader whom you will appoint will have all the rights of command and of obedience. So, reflect well, for on this man will depend the fate of all."

Having thus spoken, Jean-Claude descended from his elevation, and all was bustle and excitement. Each village deliberated separately, each mayor proposed his man, and in the meanwhile time was going on. Catherine Lefèvre was burning with impatience. At length, unable to contain herself any longer, she stood up on her seat, and made a sign that she wished to speak.

Catherine was held in the highest estimation. At first some, then a greater number, drew near to learn what she had to say to them.

"My friends," said she, "we are losing too much time. What is it you require? A trusty leader, is it not? A soldier, who has been used to war, and who knows how to turn our positions to the best account? Well, then, why do you not choose Hullin? Is there one among you who can find a better man? If so, let him speak at once, that we may decide. For my part, I propose Jean-Claude Hullin. Do you hear, down below there? If this goes on much longer, the Austrians will be here before we have chosen a leader."

"Yes! yes! Hullin!" exclaimed Labarbe, Divès, Jérôme, and several others.

"Come, let us collect the votes for or against."

Then Marc Divès, climbing on to the trunks of timber, exclaimed, in a voice of thunder, "Let those who do not desire to have Jean-Claude Hullin for a leader hold up their hand."

Not a hand appeared.

"Let those who desire to have Jean-Claude Hulin for a leader hold up their hand."

Every hand was in the air.

"Jean-Claude," said the smuggler, "come up here, and look around. It is you whom they demand for a leader."

Master Jean-Claude, having done as desired, saw that he was appointed, and at once spoke in a firm tone, and said:—"Good. You appoint me your leader. I accept the post. Let the elder Materne, Labarbe of Dagsburg, Jérôme of Saint-Quirin, Marc Divès, Piorette the sawyer, and Catherine Lefèvre, go into the sawpit. We will hold a council. In a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes I will issue orders. Meanwhile, let each village supply two men to Marc Divès for the transport of powder and ball to Falkenstein."



CHAPTER IX.

ALL those whom Jean-Claude Hullin had named assembled under the shed of the sawpit around the immense hearth. A sort of pleased good-humour beamed in the faces of these brave men.

"For twenty years have I heard talk of the Russians, the Austrians, and the Cossacks," said old Materne, with a smile; "and now I shall not be sorry to see a few of them within range of my gun; that will be quite another thing."

"Yes," replied Labarbe; "we shall see some strange things; the little children of the mountain will be able to relate stories of their fathers and grandfathers, and the old women, won't they tell legends round the fire in fifty years to come?"

"Comrades," said Hullin, "you know all the country round; you have the mountain under your eyes from Thann to Wissembourg. You know that two highways, two imperial roads, cross Alsace and the Vosges. They both come from Bâle; one follows the course of the Rhine as far as Strasbourg, from whence it proceeds along the borders of the Saverne till it reaches Lorraine. It is protected by Huningen, Neuf-Brisach, Strasbourg, and Phalsbourg. The other turns to the left, and goes as far as Schlestadt; from Schlestadt it enters the

mountain, and reaches Saint-Dié, Raon-l'Etape, Baccarat, and Lunéville. At first the enemy wanted to force these two roads, as being better for the cavalry, artillery, and baggage; but as they are defended, we have nothing to fear on that head. If the Allies besiege the strong places—which will lengthen out the campaign—then we shall have nothing to fear; but that is no very probable. After having summoned Huningen to surrender, Belfort, Schlestadt, Strasbourg, and Phalsbourg, on this side of the Vosges; Bitche, Lutzelstein, and Sarrebrück on the other, I think they will fall upon us. Now, listen to me well. Between Phalsbourg and Saint-Dié there are several defiles for the infantry; but there is only one road available for cannon; that is the road from Strasbourg to Raon-les-Leaux by Urmatt, Mutzig, Lutzelhouse, Phramond, Grandfontaine. Once masters of this passage, the Allies could come down upon Lorraine. This road leads to the Donon, two leagues from here on our right. The first thing to do is to establish ourselves firmly there in the spot most favourable to the defence—that is to say, on the sides of the mountain; to intersect it, to break down the bridges, and to throw strong barricades across it. A few hundred strong trees laid across a road with all their branches are as good as ramparts. They serve, too, for the best ambuscades, as you are well sheltered, and can see all that is going on. Those big trees are the very devil! you have to cut them down bit to bit; you cannot throw bridges over them; in fact, there's nothing better. All this, comrades, will be done by to-morrow evening, or the day after at latest. I will undertake that; but it is not enough to occupy a position, and put it in a good state of defence;

we must still further manage that the enemy cannot turn it."

"Just what I was thinking," said Materne. "Once in the valley of the Bruche, the Germans can enter with the infantry among the hills of Haslach, and turn our left. Nothing can prevent their trying the same manœuvre on our right, if they succeed in reaching Raon-l'Etape."

"Yes; but to prevent that, we have one very simple thing to do; that is, to occupy the defiles of the Zorn and the Sarre on our left, and that of the Blanru on our right. The best way to guard a defile is by holding the heights; Piorette will, therefore, station himself with a hundred men on the side of Raon-les-Leaux; Jérôme, on the Grosmann, with a like number, to defend the valley of the Sarre; and Labarbe, at the head of the rest, to overlook the hills of the Haslach. You will choose your men from among those of the nearest villages. The women must not have far to go to bring provisions, and then the wounded will be nearer home, which must be thought of, too. This is, for the present, all I have to say to you. The leaders will be careful to send to me every day to the Donon, where I am going to establish this very evening our head-quarters, a good walker, to inform me of all that is going on, and receive the password. We will organize also a reserve; but, as we must make the greatest haste, we will talk of that when you have all taken up your positions, and when there is no longer any fear of surprise on the part of the enemy."

"And I," exclaimed Marc Divès; "I shall have nothing to do, then? I am to remain with my arms folded looking at the others fighting?"

"For you, your duty will be to overlook the transport of the ammunition; none of us understand like you managing powder, preserving it from fire and damp, casting bullets, and making cartridges."

"But all that is woman's work," exclaimed the smuggler; "Hexe-Baizel would do it as well as me. What! am I not to fire a single shot?"

"Be easy, Marc," replied Hullin, with a laugh; "you will not want for opportunities. In the first place, the Falkenstein is the centre of our line—it is our arsenal, and our point of retreat in case of misfortune. The enemy will know, through his spies, that our convoys set out from thence; he will probably attempt to intercept them. You will have enough of bullets, and bayonets, too. Besides, even if you are under shelter, so much the better, for it would not do to confide your caves to the first comer. Still, if you really wish——"

"No," said the smuggler, who had been struck by Hullin's remark about his caves; "no; all things well considered, I believe you are right, Jean-Claude. I have my men; they are well armed. We will defend the Falkenstein, and if an opportunity of firing a shot offers I shall be more free."

"Then this matter is arranged, and we all understand?" asked Hullin.

"Yes, yes; we understand."

"Well, comrades," exclaimed the brave man, in a joyful accent, "let us warm our hearts with a few good glasses of wine. It is ten o'clock, so let everyone return to his village, and make his preparations. To-morrow morning, at the latest, all the defiles of the mountain must be strongly occupied."

They then came out of the shed, and Hulin, in presence of all, named as leaders Labarbe, Jérôme, and Piorette; he then told all those of the Sarre to assemble as soon as possible near the farm of Bois-de-Chênes with hatchets, pickaxes, and guns. "We will set out at two o'clock," said he, "and we will encamp on the Donon along the road. To-morrow, at day-break, we will begin our entrenchments."

He detained old Materne and his sons Frantz and Kasper, to announce to them that the battle would doubtless commence at the Donon, and that they should, therefore, need some good marksmen in that part, at which they were greatly pleased.

Dame Lefèvre had never appeared happier. As she got up again into her cart, she embraced Louise, and whispered in her ear: "All is going well. Jean-Claude is a man; he sees everything; he carries everyone along with him. Even me, who have known him for forty years, he astonishes me."

Then turning to him: "Jean-Claude," said she, "we have a ham waiting for us at home, and a few bottles of old wine, that we'll not leave for the Germans to drink."

"No, Catherine; they shall not drink them. Come on."

But just as she was flourishing her whip, and as a goodly number of mountaineers were ascending the steep sides of the mountain on their way back to their respective villages, there was seen approaching, in the extreme distance, a tall, thin man sitting in his goat-skin saddle, a hare-skin cap on his head, which he held erect. An enormous long-haired sheep-dog came

bounding along by his side, and the flaps of his immense riding-coat flew behind him like wings. Everyone exclaimed: "It is Doctor Lorquin of the plain; he who attends the poor gratis. Here he comes, with his dog Pluto; ah! he is a worthy man!"

It was indeed he; he came galloping along, shouting at the top of his voice, "Halt! stop! halt!" and with his face as red as fire, his big eyes sparkling with excitement, his long beard of a reddish brown, his broad stooping shoulders, and his great bounding sheep-dog, he came along at a swinging pace. In two more minutes he had reached the foot of the mountain, crossed the meadow, and brought up in front of the shed. Immediately after a voice, panting for breath, was heard to say, "Ah! how deaf you all are! and the idea of going on a campaign without me! You shall pay for it!" touching a little chest, which he was carrying behind him, "Stay a minute, my lads," said he; "I've something in there that you can't very well do without. I have in there little knives and large ones, round and sharp ones, for digging out the bullets, and shot of all sorts, that you will be peppered with." And then he burst into a loud peal of laughter, and all the spectators felt their flesh creep.

Having given utterance to this agreeable pleasantry, Doctor Lorquin resumed, in a graver tone, "Hullin, I must pull your ears for you. What! forget me, when the point in question was the defence of our country! Suffer me to be informed of it by others! And yet it seems to me that a doctor will be in requisition here. I must blame you."

"Forgive me, doctor ; I have been in the wrong," said Hullin, warmly pressing his hand. "During the last week so many things have happened. You cannot always think of everybody ; and, besides, a man like you does not require to be warned of his duty to fulfil it."

The doctor's brow relaxed. "All this is very well, and very good," he exclaimed ; "but that does not alter the fact that, by your neglect, I might have arrived too late. All the good places are taken, the crosses distributed. Come, lead me to the general, that I may prefer my complaint to him."

"I am the general, and I appoint you surgeon-in-chief to the forces."

"Surgeon-in-chief to the forces of the Vosges ! Well, that will suit me. No malice, Jean-Claude." Then, approaching the cart, the worthy man told Catherine that he should depend upon her for the organization of the *ambulances*.

"Make your mind easy, doctor," replied the farm-mistress ; "all shall be ready. Louise and I will make that our special care from this very evening ; will we not, Louise ?"

"Oh, yes ! Mother Lefèvre," murmured the young girl, enchanted to see that they had actually commenced the campaign ; "we will work hard, day and night, if needs be. M. Lorquin may make his mind quite easy."

"Well, then, forward ! You dine with us, doctor."

The little cart set out at full trot ; all along the road, the good doctor laughingly recounted to Catherine how

the news of the general rising had reached him ; the despair of his old housekeeper, Marie, who strove hard to prevent his going to be massacred by the *kaiserlicks* ; in short, the different episodes of his journey from Quibolo to the village of Charmes. Hullin, Materne, and his boys walked a few steps behind, with gun on shoulder, and in this way they ascended the mountain, and directed their steps towards the farm of Bois-de-Chênes.



CHAPTER X.

You may imagine the state of excitement at the farm, the comings and goings of the servants, enthusiastic shouts of all, the clinkings of glasses, and clatterings of knives and forks, the joy painted on every face, when Jean-Claude, Doctor Lorquin, the Maternes, and all those who had followed Catherine's vehicle, were installed in the large house-room at the farm, around a magnificent ham, and had set steadily to work to celebrate their future triumphs cup in hand.

It chanced to be on a Tuesday, always a grand cooking day at the farm.

The great kitchen fire had been blazing since morning; old Duchêne, in his shirt-sleeves, was drawing from the oven innumerable manchets of bread, the good smell of which pervaded the whole house. Annette took them from his hands, and piled them up in a corner of the hearth. Louise waited on the guests, and Catherine Lefèvre superintended everything, calling out as she did so :

"Make haste, children, make haste, the third batch must be ready by the time the men from the Sarre arrive. That will make six pounds of bread a man."

Hullin, from his place, watched the old farm-mistress as she came and went.

"What a woman !" he exclaimed, "what a woman !

Go and find me such another the whole country round !
She forgets nothing ! The health of Catherine Lefèvre !”

“The health of Catherine Lefèvre !” was loudly responded by all the rest.

There was a renewed clinking of glasses, and then the talk fell again on marches, attacks, and entrenchments. Every one felt inspired by an invincible confidence ; every one said to himself, “All will prosper.”

But Heaven was reserving for them on that day a still greater pleasure and surprise, and especially for Louise and Dame Lefèvre. Towards noon, just as a bright ray of the winter’s sun was making the snow look whiter than ever and melting the hoar-frost on the window-panes, and the great red cock thrusting his head out of the fowl-house was flapping his wings and making the echoes of the Valtin resound with his shrill cry of triumph, all of a sudden the watch-dog, old Yohan, who was quite toothless, and very nearly blind, began to give vent to a succession of barks at once so joyous and so plaintive, that everyone’s attention was attracted.

The great kitchen fire was blazing at its height ; the third batch was being drawn from the oven, and yet Catherine Lefèvre herself stopped to listen.

“There is something going to happen,” said she, in a low tone.

Then she added, in a voice that shook with emotion :

“Since my boy left home, Yohan has never barked like that.”

At the same moment rapid steps were heard crossing the courtyard ; Louise sprang towards the door, exclaiming, “It is he ! it is he !” and almost immediately

a trembling hand was at the latch; the door opened, and a soldier appeared at the threshold, but a soldier, so lank, sunburnt, and haggard, his old grey overcoat with pewter buttons so worn out, his long cloth gaiters so torn and discoloured, that all the spectators were speechless with surprise.

He seemed unable to take a step farther, as he firmly put the butt-end of his gun to the ground. The tip of his eagle nose—the exact counterpart of Dame Lefèvre's—shone like bronze, his red moustaches quivered; he looked just like one of those lean, hungry hawks driven by famine in winter to the stable doors. He looked straight into the kitchen, and his cheeks seemed to turn pale beneath their tinge of sun-brown, and his hollow eyes filled with tears as he stood there without being able to speak a word or advance a step.

Out of doors the old dog kept leaping, and whining, and rattling his chain as if he would break it; within, not a sound could be heard but the crackling of the fire, so deep was the silence; but very soon the voice of Catherine Lefèvre was heard exclaiming, in heartrending tones:—

“Gaspard!—my child! It is you!”

“Yes, mother!” replied the soldier, in a voice choking with emotion.

And in a second Louise had begun to sob, whilst all in the vast room rose at once with a noise like thunder.

All ran towards him, with Master Jean-Claude at their head, shouting:

“Gaspard!—Gaspard Lefèvre!”

But Gaspard and his mother were clasped in each other's arms: this woman, usually so strong-minded

After Leipzig.

so courageous, was weeping unrestrainedly; her son shed no tears, but held her close to his heart, his red moustaches buried in her gray locks, as he murmured:

"Mother! mother! ah! how often have I thought of you!"

Then, in a louder voice:

"Louise!" said he, "I saw Louise!"

And Louise rushed into his arms, and they mingled their tears and kisses together.

"Ah! you did not know me again, Louise!"

"Oh! yes—oh! yes, I knew you directly by your step."

Old Duchêne, with his cotton night-cap in his hand, stood by the fire stammering:

"Gracious Lord—is it possible? my poor child—how changed he is!"

He had brought Gaspard up, and always pictured him since his departure fresh and ruddy-checked, in a handsome uniform with red facings. It deranged all his ideas to see him otherwise.

At this moment Hullin, raising his voice, said:

"And we, Gaspard, all of us, your old friends, have you nothing to say to us?"

Then the brave fellow turned round, and uttered a shout of recognition:

"Hullin! Doctor Lorquin! Materne! Frantz! all! they are all here!"

And the embracings began again, but this time more joyously, mingled with shouts of laughter and hearty hand-shakings, that seemed as if they would never come to an end.

"Ah! Doctor, is that you? Ah! my old Papa Jean-Claude!"

They looked at him again and again, staring him full in the face with countenances beaming with joy, as if to assure themselves that it was really he; then, linking their arms in his, they carried rather than led him into the kitchen, and Dame Catherine followed with his knapsack, Louise with the gun, Duchêne with the tall shako, all laughing and crying by turns, and drying their eyes and cheeks. You never saw anything like it.

"Come, let us sit down—let us drink!" exclaimed Doctor Lorquin; "this is the *bouquet* of the feast."

"Ah! my poor Gaspard, how glad I am to see you come back again safe and sound," said Hullin. "He! he! without wishing to flatter you, I like you better as you are than with your fat red cheeks. You are a man now, i'faith! You remind me of the old soldiers of my own time, the men of Sambre, of Egypt, ha! ha! ha! we had no fat cheeks among us! we were not sleek and shining! We looked more like hungry rats who have just caught sight of a piece of cheese, and our teeth were long and white, I warrant you."

"Yes, yes; that does not surprise me, Papa Jean-Claude," replied Gaspard. "Sit down, sit down; we shall talk more at our ease. But what is this?—what brings you all to the farm?"

"What! you **do** not know? All the country is up in arms, from **the Houpe** to St. Sauveur, to defend ourselves."

"Yes, the Anabaptist of Painbach told me something of this as I was passing; it is true, then?"

"Is it true? Why, everyone is engaged in it, and I am general-in-chief."

"All right, all right; a thousand thunders! Let

those dogs of *kaiserlicks* have their own way in our country! that wouldn't suit me at all. But just pass me the knife. Whatever happens, it's always jolly to find oneself at home again. I say, Louise, just come and sit beside me a little. Look, Papa Jean-Claude, with my little girl on one side of me, that capital ham on the other, and a jug of good wine forming the line in front, it would not take me a fortnight to get into condition again, and my comrades would not know me again when I joined my company."

Everybody had sat down again, and was fully employed in watching with wondering looks the brave soldier, cutting, carving, quaffing, then casting tender glances at Louise and his mother, and replying to one and another without at the same time losing a single mouthful.

The farm people, Duchêne, Annette, Robin, and Dubourg, ranged behind in a half-circle, stood gazing upon Gaspard in a sort of ecstasy; Louise kept filling up his glass, while Dame Lefèvre, sitting near the oven, looked over the contents of his knapsack, and finding there nothing but two old shirts quite black with dirt, and with holes large enough to put your hand in, a pair of shoes down at heel, an empty tobacco-pouch, a comb with three teeth, and an empty bottle, she lifted up her hands, murmuring to herself: "Good Lord! need we be surprised that so many die of starvation!"

Doctor Lorquin, at the sight of such a vigorous appetite, gleefully rubbed his hands, as he muttered from under his thick beard: "What a fellow it is! What a digestion! What a set of teeth! Why, he could crack pebbles like nuts!"

And even old Materne said to his boys: "In my

time, after a two or three days' hunt on the mountain tops in winter, I have known what it was, too, to have the appetite of a wolf, and to eat the haunch of a roebuck at a sitting; now I am grown old, a pound or two of meat is enough for me. Age makes all the difference!"

Hullin had lit his pipe, and seemed absent and thoughtful; it was plain that he was uneasy about something. After a few moments, seeing Gaspard's appetite begin to relax, he abruptly exclaimed: "But tell us, Gaspard, if I may make so bold as to ask, how does it happen that you are here? We thought you were still on the Strasbourg side of the Rhine!"

"Ah! ha! old boy, I understand," said young Lefèvre, with a knowing wink; "there are so many deserters; is it not so?"

"Oh! such an idea as that would never enter my head! and yet——"

"You would not be sorry to know if we are all right and correct! I don't blame you, Papa Jean-Claude; you are quite right; those who don't answer to the muster-roll when the *kaiserlicks* are in France, richly deserve to be shot! Make your mind happy; there's my leave."

Hullin, who had no false delicacy, read: "Twenty-four hours' leave of absence to Grenadier Gaspard Lefèvre, of the 2nd company of the 1st regiment.—January the 3rd, 1814. GEMEAU, chief of the battalion." "Good, good," said he; "put it up in your knapsack; you might chance to lose it."

All his good-humour had returned.

"Look you, my children," said he, "I know what ove is; there is bad and good about it; but it is bad

n particular for young soldiers who come too near their homes after a campaign. They are capable of forgetting all and everything till they find themselves brought back with two or three gendarmes at their heels. I've seen that happen before now. But, however, since everything is clear and straightforward here, let's drain a bumper of *rikevir*. What say you, Catherine? The men of the Sarre may arrive from one moment to the next, and we have not an instant to lose."

"You say well, Jean-Claude," replied the old farm-mistress, sadly. "Go down and bring up three bottles from the little cellar, Annette."

The servant-girl ran quickly out at her mistress's orders.

"But this leave, Gaspard," continued Catherine, "how much longer has it to run?"

"I received it yesterday, at eight in the evening, at Vasselonne, mother. The regiment is in retreat upon Lorraine; I must rejoin it this evening at Phalsbourg."

"Well and good; you have still seven hours before you. It will not take you more than six to get there, though there is a good deal of snow at Foxthâl."

The good woman came and sat down by her son. Her heart was full almost to bursting; she could not conceal her grief. Everyone was deeply touched. Louise, with her arm on Gaspard's worn-out epaulet, and her cheek pressed against his, was sobbing as if her heart would break. Hullin knocked the ashes out of his pipe on the corner of the table; he sat silently, with knitted brows and compressed lips; but as soon as the bottles made their appearance and were uncorked,

"Come, Louise!" he exclaimed, "courage! what the deuce! All this will be only for a short time; it must come to an end some way or another, and I say that it will end well. Gaspard will come back, and we shall have a happy wedding."

He filled up the glasses as he spoke, and Catherine wiped her eyes as she murmured: "And to think that all these robbers are the cause of this happening to us! Ah, let them come! let them only come here!"

They drank, though in a melancholy sort of way, but the good old *rikevür*, as it found its way to the hearts of these worthy people, soon cheered their drooping spirits. Gaspard, stronger than he had appeared at first, began to relate the terrible affairs of Bautzen, Lutzen, Leipzig, and Hanau, where the conscripts had fought like veterans, gaining victory upon victory until traitors found their way among them. Everyone listened with silent interest; Louise, when the recital touched upon moments of great danger—crossing rivers under the enemy's fire, carrying a battery at the point of the bayonet—pressing his arm as if to defend him. Jean-Claude's eyes sparkled. The doctor always wanted to know the exact position of the ambulances; Materne and his sons stretched out their necks, and showed by the rigid compression of their massive red-bearded jaws how eagerly they were drinking in every word that fell from his lips, and with the aid of the generous wine, the general enthusiasm increased each moment, and every now and then vented itself in muttered expressions. "Oh! the dogs! the villains! let them beware! All is not over yet!"

Dame Lefèvre admired the courage and good fortune

of her son in the midst of these events, the memory of which will be preserved from generation to generation. But when Lagarmitte, grave and solemn, in his long gray gaberdine, his large black felt hat upon his head, his wooden horn on his shoulder, crossed the kitchen, and, standing in the doorway, announced, "The men from the Sarre are coming!" then all this excitement disappeared, and everyone rose, thinking only of the terrible struggle which was shortly going to begin on the mountain.

Louise threw her arms round Gaspard's neck, exclaiming: "Gaspard, do not leave us! Stay with us!"

He turned very pale. "I am a soldier," said he; "my name is Gaspard Lefèvre; I love thee, Louise, a thousand times better than my own life, but a Lefèvre knows nothing but his duty!" And he unclasped her arms from about his neck. Then Louise sank, half-fainting, down, and, with her head lying on the table, began to groan aloud. Gaspard rose.

Hullin placed himself between them, and pressing his hands warmly, while his own strong frame shook with emotion, "Right, my lad!" said he; "spoken like a man, and a brave one, too."

His mother approached more calmly to buckle his knapsack on to his shoulders. She performed that task with knit brows, her lips firmly compressed under her long hooked nose, without uttering a sigh; but two big tears slowly coursed each other down the furrows in her cheeks. And when she had finished, turning round with her sleeve to her eyes, she said, "There; go, go, my child, thy mother blesses thee. If war seizes thee for its prey, still thou wilt not be dead to us. See,

Gaspard, there is thy place; there, between Louise and me; thou wilt ever be there! This poor child is not yet old enough to know that to live is but to suffer."

Everyone went out. Louise, left alone, began to weep and groan afresh. A few moments after, as she heard the butt end of his gun resounding on the flagstones and the outer door opening, she rushed out after him, shrieking in heartrending tones, "Gaspard! Gaspard! see, I will be firm; I will not cry any more; I do not want to keep you back—oh, no, but do not leave me in anger; have pity on me!"

"Anger! angry with you, my darling! Oh, no, no," he replied. "But to see you so miserable breaks my heart. Ah! if you had but a little firmness now, I should be happy."

"Well, then, I have; kiss me. See, I am no longer the same. I will try to be like our good mother Lefèvre."

They exchanged their parting embrace with more calmness. Hullin stood by, holding the gun; Catherine waved her hand, as much as to say, "Go, go—enough."

And he, suddenly seizing his weapon, departed, with a firm step, and without once turning his head.

On the other side, the men of the Sarre, with their pickaxes and hatchets, were climbing in procession the steep and rugged ascent of the Valtin.

At the end of five minutes, at the turning by the great oak, Gaspard looked round, and waved his hand. Catherine and Louise answered him. Hullin then came forward to meet his men. Doctor Lorquin

alone remained with the women ; when Gaspard, continuing his way, was quite out of sight, he exclaimed :—
“ Catherine Lefèvre, you may be proud of having so brave a man for your son. Heaven speed and prosper him !”

They heard the distant voices of the new-comers, who were laughing gaily among themselves, and marching to war as to a marriage festival.



CHAPTER XI.

WHILST Hullin, at the head of the mountaineers, was taking his measures for the defence of his country, the fool Yégof—that being deprived of the blessing of self-consciousness, that unhappy creature with his tin crown, that sad spectacle of humanity shorn of its noblest, greatest, most vital attribute, intelligence—the fool Yégof, his breast exposed to the cutting wind, his feet bare, insensible to cold, like the reptile in his icy prison, was wandering from mountain to mountain, in the midst of the snows of winter.

Whence comes it that the madman is able to resist the sharpest severity of the atmosphere, while an intelligent being would succumb to it? Does it arise from a more powerful concentration of life, a more rapid circulation of the blood, a state of perpetual fever? Or is it the effect of the over-excitement of the senses, or any other unknown cause?

Science says nothing. She admits only material causes, powerless to give an account of such phenomena.

So Yégof went on at random, and night came. The cold was redoubled, the fox gnashed his teeth in the pursuit of an invisible prey; the famished buzzard fell back with empty claws among the bushes, uttering a cry of distress. He, with his raven on his shoulder, gesticulating, jabbering, as if in a dream, kept marching,

marching on, from Holderloch to Sonneberg, from Sonneberg to Blutfeld.

Now, on this particular night, the old shepherd, Robin, of the farm of Bois-de-Chêne, was destined to be the witness of a most strange and fearful sight.

Some days before, having been overtaken by the first fall of snow at the bottom of the gorge of the Blutfeld, he had left his cart there to conduct his flock back to the farm; but having discovered that he had forgotten his sheepskin, and left it in a shed there, he had on this day, when his work was done, set out about four o'clock in the afternoon to go and fetch it.

The Blutfeld, situated between the Schnéeberg and the Grosmann, is a narrow gorge, bounded by perpendicular rocks. A narrow stream of water winds through it, summer and winter, under shadow of the tall shrubs, and in its depths extends a vast pasturage, all covered with large gray stones, that lie thickly scattered about.

This defile is very little frequented by the dwellers in the mountains, for there is a wild and weird look about the Blutfeld, especially by the pale light of a winter's moon. The learned folks of these regions, the schoolmasters of Dagsburg, and of Hazlach, say that in that spot occurred the famous battle of the Triboques against the Germans, who wished to penetrate into Gaul, under the command of a leader named Luitprandt. They say that the Triboques, from the surrounding mountain-tops, hurling upon their enemies huge masses of rocks, crushed them there as in a mortar, and that, on account of this great carnage, the gorge has preserved to this day the name of *Blutfeld* (field of blood). Fragments of broken pots, of rusty lances, bits

of helmets, and long swords with cross hilts, are often found there.

At night time, when the moon sheds her soft light upon this field and those immense stones, all covered with snow, when the north wind blows and whistles among the frost-covered branches, making them rustle and clatter like cymbals, you might fancy you heard the wild cry of the Germans at the moment of surprise, the shrieks and groans of the women, the neighings of the horses, the hoarse rumbling of the chariots in the defile ; for it appears that these people brought with them, in their skin-covered carriages, women, children, old men, and all that they possessed in gold, and silver, and moveables, like the Germans setting out for America. The Triboques never ceased to massacre them during two days, and on the third they went back to the Donon, the Schnéeberg, the Grosmann, the Giromâni, the Hengst, their broad shoulders stooping under the weight of their booty.

This is what is related concerning the Blutfeld, and certainly to see this gorge enclosed within the mountains like an immense trap, without any other outlet than a narrow footpath, it is easy to understand how the Germans might have been surprised there, and fallen an easy prey to their victors.

Robin did not reach the spot till between seven and eight o'clock, just as the moon was rising.

The honest fellow had descended the precipice a hundred times, but never had he beheld the place so brightly illuminated and at the same time of so gloomy and sinister an aspect.

At a distance, his white cart, standing at the bottom of the abyss, looked to him exactly like one of those

enormous stones, covered with snow, beneath which the Germans had been interred. It was at the entrance of the gorge, behind a thick cluster of shrubs, and beside it the little torrent ran murmuring in a slender stream, bright as steel, and sparkling like diamonds.

When he arrived at the place, the shepherd began to look for the key of the padlock; then, having unlocked the shed, he crept in on his hands and knees, and found, very fortunately, not only his sheepskin, but even an old hatchet which he had quite forgotten.

But judge of his surprise when, on issuing from it, he saw the fool Yégof appear at the turn of the footpath, and come straight towards him in the bright moonlight.

The honest man immediately remembered the terrible story told in the kitchen of Bois-de-Chênes, and he felt afraid; but quite another feeling came over him when behind the fool, at fifteen or twenty paces, he beheld, stealthily approaching in their turn, five grey wolves, two big and three smaller ones.

At first he took them for dogs, but they were wolves. They followed Yégof step by step, and he did not appear to see them; his raven hovered overhead, flitting from the full moonlight to the shadow of the rocks, and then returning; the wolves, with flaming eyes, their sharp muzzles turned up, were sniffing the air; the fool raised his sceptre.

The shepherd pulled to the door of the shed as quick as lightning, but Yégof did not see him. He advanced into the gorge as into a spacious audience-chamber; to the right and left rose the steep rocks, far above which myriads of stars were shining. You might have heard

a fly move; the wolves trod the ground noiselessly; not a sound was there, and the raven had just perched on the top of an old withered oak that grew upon one of the rocks opposite; his shining plumage looked still darker than usual, as he turned his head, and seemed to be listening.

It was a strange sight.

Robin said to himself:—"The fool sees nothing, hears nothing; they will devour him. If he stumbles, if his foot slips, it is all over with him."

But in the middle of the gorge, Yégof, having turned round, sat down upon a stone, and the five wolves, all round him, still sniffing the air, squatted on their haunches in the snow.

And then, a really terrible sight, the fool raising his sceptre, addressed a speech to them, calling them each by their names.

The wolves answered him with dismal howls.

Now this is what he said to them:—"Hé! Child, Bléed, Merweg, and thou, Sirimar, my ancient, we are met together, then, once again! You have come back fat. There has been good cheer in Germany, eh?"

Then, pointing to the snow-covered gorge:—"You remember the great battle?"

First one of the wolves began to howl slowly in a dismal voice, then another, then all the five together.

This lasted a good ten minutes.

The raven, perched on the withered branch, did not stir.

Robin would gladly have fled. He put up his prayers, invoked all the saints, and, in particular, his own patron, for whom all the shepherds of the mountain have the highest veneration.

But the wolves still continued to utter their dismal howlings, awakening all the echoes of the Blutfeld.

At last one, the oldest of the number, was silent, then another, then all, and Yégof continued :—"Yes, yes ; that is a dismal story. See ! behold ! there is the river down which our blood flowed in streams ! No matter, Merweg, no matter ; the others have left their bones to whiten on the common, and the cold moon has seen their women tearing their hair for three days and three nights ! Oh ! that terrible day ! Oh ! the dogs ! were they proud of their great victory ! Let them be accursed —accursed !"

The fool had cast his crown to the ground. He now picked it up, groaning as he did so.

The wolves, still seated round, listened to him like attentive spectators. The biggest among them began to howl, and Yégof answered his complaint.

"You are hungry, Sirimar ; take comfort, take comfort ; you will not want for food much longer ; the men of our side are coming, and the strife will begin afresh."

Then rising, and striking his sceptre on a stone.

"See," said he, "behold thy bones !"

He approached another.

"And thine, Merweg, behold them !" said he.

All the troop followed him, while he, raising himself upon a low rock, and glancing round upon the still and silent gorge, exclaimed :—"Our war song is silent ! our war song is now a groan ! The hour is near ; it will re-awaken, and you will be among the warriors, you will possess once more these valleys and these mountains. Oh ! that sound of wheels, those cries of women, those blows from crushing rocks and stones ; I

hear them ; the air is full of them. Yes, yes ; they fell on us from above, and we were surrounded. And now all is dead ; hark ! all is dead ; your bones sleep, but your children are on their way, and your turn will come. Sing, sing !”

And this time he himself began to howl, whilst the wolves broke out afresh in their savage war-cry.

These dismal howls grew more and more loud and appalling, and the silence of the rocks around, some plunged in thick darkness, while others were fully revealed in the moon's bright rays, the solemn stillness of every tree and shrub beneath its weight of snow, the distant echoes replying with a mysterious voice to the mournful concert, all were calculated to strike terror into the breast of the old shepherd.

But by degrees his fears grew less, for Yégof and his dismal followers were getting farther and farther away from him, and gradually retreating towards Hazlach.

The raven, in his turn, unfurled his wings, and took his flight through the pale vault of heaven.

The whole scene vanished like a dream !

Robin heard for a long time after the howlings of the retreating wolves. They had completely ceased for more than twenty minutes, and not a sound broke the deep silence of the winter night, when the worthy man felt himself sufficiently recovered from his fright to come out of his hiding-place, and take his way back at full speed to the farm.

On arriving at Bois-de-Chênes, he found everybody up and stirring. They were going to kill an ox for the troops from the Donon. Hullin, Doctor Lorquin, and Louise were already gone with the men from the Sarre.

Catherine Lefèvre was busy, having her great waggon, with four horses, loaded with bread, meat, and brandy. People were coming and going in all directions, and all eagerly lending a helping hand in the preparations.

Robin had no opportunity of relating to anyone all that he had seen and heard. Besides, it seemed to himself so incredible that he really dared not open his mouth about it.

When he had retired to rest in his crib in the middle of the stable, he said to himself that no doubt Yégof had, during the winter, tamed a litter of young wolves, and that he babbled his folly to them in the same way that one talks sometimes to one's dog.

But, for all that, this strange encounter left a superstitious dread upon his mind, and even when he had arrived at a great age, the good old man never spoke of it without shuddering.



CHAPTER XII.

ALL was accomplished that Hullin had commanded : the defiles of the Zorne, and of the Sarre, were strongly defended ; that of the Blanru, the extreme of the position, had been put in a state of defence by Jean-Claude himself and the three hundred men who formed his principal force.

It is thither, on the eastern acclivity of the Donon, two *kilometres'* distance from Grandfontaine, that we must transport ourselves to await the coming of events.

Above the high road which intersects the mountain two-thirds of the way up, was at that time to be observed a farm surrounded by a few acres of cultivated land, the homestead of Pelsly, the Anabaptist, a large building with a flat roof such as was needed to avoid being carried away by the strong gusts of wind. The back part, extending in the direction of the mountain top, was appropriated to the stables and pigsties.

The confederates were encamped all around. At their feet lay Grandfontaine and Framont, confined within a narrow gorge ; farther off, at the turning of the valley, Schirmeck, and its old pile of feudal ruins ; and in the greatest distance of all, the Bruche disappearing in zig-zag in the vapourish mists of Alsace.

To their left rose the barren summit of the Donon, thickly strewn with rocks and some stubbly firs; while before them was the snow-covered road, with huge trees unstripped of their branches thrown across it. The melting snow suffered the yellow pasture land to appear from time to time; at others it formed large waves tossed to and fro by the fierce north wind.

The prospect was at once awful and sublime. Not a pedestrian, not a vehicle appeared on the road which winds through the valley till it gradually disappears in the distance: the whole place seemed like a desert.

The few fires scattered round about the farm, sending their puffs of dense smoke up to the sky, alone indicated the position of the camp. The mountaineers seated round the fires over which their food was cooking, their broad-brimmed hats pushed back on their heads, their guns slung on their shoulders, were quite sad and desponding: for three days they had been on the lookout.

In one of these groups, with crossed legs, rounded back, and pipe in mouth, were old Materne and his two sons.

From time to time Louise would appear at the door of the farm, then re-enter very quickly and set to work again. A large cock, scratching on the dunghill, was crowing with a hoarse voice; two or three fowls were strutting up and down among the bushes. All this was pleasant to behold; but what chiefly rejoiced the volunteers was to contemplate the magnificent sides of bacon, of a beautiful red and white, so temptingly blended, hanging before the fire on spits of green wood, and yielding their luscious fat drop by drop on

the embers, and to go and fill their drinking-cups at a little barrel of brandy placed on Catherine Lefèvre's cart.

About eight o'clock in the morning, a man suddenly made his appearance between the Great and Little Donon; the sentinels immediately observed him; he descended the pathway, waving his hat. In a few minutes they recognised Nickel Bentz, the old forest ranger of the Houpe.

The whole camp was astir; some one ran to inform Hullin, who had been sleeping for an hour in the home-stead on a large mattrass, side by side with Doctor Lorquin and his dog Pluto.

They all three came out, accompanied by the old shepherd, Lagarmitte, whom they had named the trumpeter, and the Anabaptist Pelsly, a grave and sedate man, his arms plunged to the elbows in his tunic of hodden grey with brass hooks, a broad fringe of beard encircling his massive jaws, and the tassel of his cotton cap hanging halfway down his back.

Jean-Claude appeared delighted. "Weil, Nickel, what's going on down below there?" he exclaimed.

"So far nothing new Master Jean-Claude; only on the Phalsbourg side there is a rumbling like a storm. Labarbe says it is cannon, for all night long flashes like lightning were seen passing over the forest of Hildehouse, and since this morning grey clouds have hung over the plain."

"The town is attacked," said Hullin; "but what news from Lutzelstein?"

"Nothing," replied Bentz.

"Then that is because the enemy will attempt to turn the place. In any case, the Allies are in the neigh-

bourhood. There must be a terrible number of them in Alsace."

Then turning towards Materne, who was standing behind, "We cannot remain any longer in uncertainty," said he; "you must depart with your two sons to reconnoitre."

The old huntsman's countenance brightened.

"All right! I shall be able then to stretch my legs a little," said he, "and try to bring down one of those Cossacks."

"One moment, old boy. You have nothing to do with bringing down anyone; all you have to do is to keep a look-out and see what is going on. Frantz and Kasper can remain armed; but for you, I know you, and you must leave your carbine here, as well as your powder-flask and hunting-knife."

"What for?"

"Why, because you will have to go into the villages, and if you were taken armed, you would be shot on the spot."

"Shot?"

"Not a doubt of it. We are not regular troops; they do not take us prisoners, they shoot us. So you will proceed on your way to Schirmeck, with a stick in your hand, and your sons will accompany you and keep at a distance under shelter of the hedges, and within gunshot. If any marauders attack you, they will come to your assistance, but if it is a column or a squadron, they will let you be taken."

"They will let me be taken!" indignantly exclaimed the old huntsman; "I should like to see that."

"Yes, Materne; and it will be the best way, for an

unarmed man they will let go; an armed man they will shoot."

"Ah! I see, I see. Yes, yes, that's not a bad thought; I never thought to part from my carbine, Jean-Claude, but in war time we must obey orders; there, there is my gun, and my flask, and my knife. Who will lend me his blouse and stick?"

Nickel Bentz handed him his blue smock-frock and felt hat.

When they had changed clothes, any one might have taken the old huntsman, in spite of his thick, gray moustaches, for a simple peasant of the mountains.

His two boys, quite proud of belonging to this first expedition, examined the priming of their carbines, each with its bayonet used for hunting the wild boar, straight and long as a sword. They felt the edge of their hunting-knives, threw their game-bags across their shoulders, and assured themselves that everything was in good order, casting flashing looks around them.

"Ha, ha!" said Doctor Lorquin, with a smile, "don't forget the advice of Master Jean-Claude. Prudence! A German more or less among a hundred thousand would not make much difference, whilst if either of you came back to us out of marching order, we should find it difficult to replace you."

"Oh! fear nothing, doctor; we shall keep our eyes open."

"My boys," replied Materne, formally, "are true hunters: they know how to wait, and take advantage of the right moment. They will not fire unless I call."

"Good luck to you!" shouted Hullin after them, as they ascended the snowy sides of the mountain, to avoid

the felled trees. After a quarter of an hour's walking, they turned round by the fir forest, and were out of sight.

Then Hullin quietly returned to the farm, talking as he went with Nickel Bentz.

Doctor Lorquin walked behind, closely followed by Pluto, and all the others went back to their places around the camp-fires.



CHAPTER XIII.

MATERNE and his two sons walked on for a long time in silence; the weather had set in fine; the pale wintry sun shone on the dazzlingly white snow without melting it. The ground still remained firm and hard. At a distance, in the valley, were outlined, with surprising clearness, the branches of the fir trees, the reddish peaks of the rocks, the roofs of the cottages, with the icicles hanging from the eaves, their little glittering window-panes, and their pointed gables.

People were walking in the street of Grandfontaine; a group of young girls were standing round the fountain, and some old men in cotton night-caps were smoking their pipes at the doors of their cottages. All this miniature world beneath the blue vault of heaven went and came and lived without a breath or a sigh reaching the ears of the foresters.

The old huntsman halted at the outskirts of the wood, and said to his sons:—"I shall go down into the village, and see Dubreuil, who keeps the 'Fir Apple.'"

He pointed with his stick to a long white building, the windows and doors surrounded by a yellow border, and a branch of pine suspended from the wall by way of a sign.

"You will await me here; if there is no danger I

will come out on the door-step, and raise my hat; you can then come and take a glass of wine with me."

He immediately descended the snow-covered mountain side, which took him full ten minutes, then made his way between two furrows, reached the meadow, crossed the village square; and his two sons, gun in hand, saw him enter the inn. A few moments after, he re-appeared at the door, and raised his hat, to their great delight.

In another quarter of an hour, they had rejoined their father in the large keeping-room of the "Fir Apple," a low apartment, heated by a large copper furnace, with a sanded floor, and long deal tables running down the centre of it.

When Materne entered, there was no one there but the innkeeper, Dubreuil, the fattest and most apoplectic of the publicans of the Vosges, with a big belly, round, goggle eyes, flat nose, a wart on his right cheek, and his triple chin falling in folds over his turned-down collar. With the exception of this curious personage, sitting in a large leathern arm-chair near the furnace, Materne was alone. He had just filled the glasses, the old clock was striking nine, and its wooden cock was flapping its wing with a curious, creaking sound.

"Your health, Father Dubreuil," said the two lads in a rough voice.

"Good day, brave boys, good day!" replied the innkeeper, forcing a smile. Then, in an oily voice, he demanded, "Is there nothing new?"

"Truly, no," replied Jasper; "this is winter, the time for hunting the wild boar."

Then, both of them depositing their carbines in the angle of the window, within reach in case of a surprise,

passed a leg across the bench, and seated themselves opposite their father, who was at the upper end of the table. At the same time they drank, saying, "To our health!" which they were always careful to do.

"So, then," said Materne, turning towards the fat man, as if to resume the course of an interrupted conversation, "you think, Father Dubreuil, that we shall have nothing to fear in the Baronies, and that we may quietly continue to hunt the wild boar?"

"Ah! as to that, I can't say anything," exclaimed the innkeeper; "only at present the Allies have not yet passed Mutzig. And, besides, they are doing no harm to any one; they receive every one kindly, and with good will, who will take up arms against the Usurper."

"The Usurper! and who is he?"

"Who? Why, Napoleon Bonaparte is the Usurper, to be sure. Just cast your eyes on that wall opposite."

He pointed to a large paper placard, posted on the wall, close to the clock.

"Look at that, and you will see that the Austrians are our true friends."

Old Materne frowned till his eyebrows met; but immediately repressing any outward sign of emotion, he merely said, "Ah, bah!"

"Yes, just read that."

"But I do not know how to read, M. Dubreuil, nor my boys either. Just explain the thing to us yourself."

Then the old innkeeper, leaning his two great red hands on the arms of his chair, rose, panting and puffing like an ox, and placed himself before the placard, with his arms a-kimbo, while, with a pompous tone, he read a proclamation from the Allied Sovereigns,

declaring that they were making war against Napoleon personally, and not against France ; in consequence of which every one was to remain quiet, and not to interfere in the matter, under pain of being burnt, pillaged, and shot.

The three hunters heard all this, and regarded each other with a strange look.

When Dubreuil had finished, he went back to his seat, and said, "You see now !"

"And where did you get that from ?" asked Kasper.

"Why, my lad, it's posted up everywhere."

"Well, we are glad of it," said Materne, laying his hand on the arm of Frantz, who was rising, with flashing eyes. "You want a light, Frantz ? Here is my match-box."

Frantz sat down again, and the old man placidly resumed—"So our good friends, the Germans, will not harm anyone ?"

"All peaceable persons have nothing to fear ; but those miscreants who rise in rebellion will have everything taken from them, which is but just, for it is not right that the good should suffer for the wicked. You yourselves, for instance, instead of harm being done to you, you would be received with welcome in the service of the allied armies. You know the country ; you would be useful as guides, and you would be liberally paid."

There was a moment's silence ; the three huntsmen looked at each other again ; the father had spread his hands upon the table, quite wide open, as if to urge his sons to be calm. Yet he himself had turned very pale.

The innkeeper, who saw nothing of all this, continued—"You would, indeed, have much more to fear

in the woods of the Baronies from those robbers of Dagsburg, La Sarre, and the Blanru, who have risen in revolt, and would like to renew the struggle of '93."

"Are you quite sure of that?" asked Materne, making a violent effort over himself.

"Am I sure of it? You need only look out of the window to answer that question; you will see them on the road from the Donon. They have surprised the Anabaptist, Pelsly; they have bound him to the foot of his bed; they are pillaging, stealing, pulling up the roads; but let them beware. A few days hence they will see some strange things. It is not with thousands of men that they will be attacked, but with tens of thousands, with *millions* of thousands. They will be all hanged!"

Materne rose. "It is time to be thinking of returning," said he, in a short, dry tone. "By two o'clock we must be back in the woods, where we can chatter away like magpies. Good day to you, Father Dubreuil."

They went out hastily, no longer able to restrain themselves for rage.

"Reflect well on what I have said to you," the innkeeper called out after them from his great arm-chair.

Once outside, Materne said, while his lips trembled with fury—"If I had not left that man, I should have broken the bottle about his head."

"And I," said Frantz, "could hardly help running my bayonet into his fat paunch."

Kasper, with one foot on the step, seemed longing to return. As he clutched the handle of his hunting-knife, his countenance wore a terrible expression. But

the old man took him by the arm, and drew him away, saying :

“Come away; we shall find another time to repay him for all this. Advise me—me—Materne—to betray my country! Hullin did well to tell us to be on our guard: he was right.”

They then descended the street, casting such angry looks to the right and left as they passed, that people said inquiringly to each other—“Why, what can be the matter with them?”

As they reached the end of the village, opposite the Old Cross, quite close to the Church, they stopped, and Materne, in a calmer tone, showing them the path that winds round by Phrâmond, through the woods, said to his sons :

“You take that road. For my part, I shall follow this as far as Schirmeck. I shall not go too quickly, to allow you time to come up with me.”

They separated, and the old huntsman in a pensive mood, and with head bowed down, walked on for a long time, asking himself by what inward power he had been able to prevent himself from breaking the head of the fat innkeeper. He answered that it was, no doubt, from the fear of compromising his sons. All the while musing on these things, Materne met, from time to time, flocks of oxen, sheep, and goats that were being driven into the mountains. There were some coming from Wisch, from Urmatt, and even from Mutzig. The poor beasts seemed ready to drop with fatigue.

“Where the deuce are you going in such a hurry?” cried the old huntsman to the dismal-looking shepherds; “have you no confidence, then, in the proclamation of the Russians and Austrians, you fellows?”

To which these gloomily replied, "Ah ! it's all very well for you to laugh. Proclamations, indeed ! We know what they are worth now. We are pillaged of all, robbed of everything ; forced contributions are got out of us, and our horses, cows, oxen, and even our vehicles carried off."

"Stop ! stop ! stop ! it can't be. What you tell me," said Materne, "quite bewilders me ! What, people so brave, so friendly, the saviours of France ! I can't believe it. Such a handsome proclamation."

"Well, then, come down to Alsace, and you will see. Seeing's believing, they say."

The poor fellows went on their way, shaking their heads with an air of profound indignation, while he laughed in his sleeve.

The farther Materne continued his route, the greater grew the number of the flocks of cattle ; not only were there troops of these, lowing and bleating, but flocks of geese were to be seen as far as the eye could reach, screaming and cackling, dragging themselves along the ground, with flapping wings, and feet half-frozen with the cold. It was a pitiable sight !

As he drew near to Schirmeck, it was much worse still ; people were flying in crowds, with their large vehicles loaded with barrels, smoked meats, furniture, women, and children, lashing the horses enough to kill them on the spot, as they kept repeating, in doleful tones : "We are lost ! the Cossacks are coming !"

This cry, "The Cossacks ! the Cossacks !" flew from one end of the road to the other like a whirlwind ; women turned round, gaping-mouthed, with fear and wonder, and children stood upright in the carts and vehicles to see as far off as they could. Never was

anything seen like it; and Materne felt indignant, and blushed for the terror of these people, who might have defended themselves, but for their selfishness and desire to save their property, which drove them to an unworthy flight.

At a branch of the road just by Schirmeck, Kasper and Frantz rejoined their father; and they all three entered the "Golden Keg" tavern, kept by the widow Faltaux, to the right of the road.

The poor woman and her two daughters were watching from a window the great migration, with tearful eyes and clasped hands.

In truth, the tumult increased from second to second. The cattle, the carriages, and the people, seemed to want to pass out over each other's backs; they seemed to have gone out of their minds, and were shouting, and even striking at each other in their mad desire to escape.

Materne pushed open the door, and, seeing the women more dead than alive, pale and dishevelled, he exclaimed, striking his stick on the ground—"What! Mother Faltaux! are you, too, out of your senses? What! you, who ought to set a good example to your daughters, have you lost all presence of mind; it's too bad!"

Then the old woman, turning round, replied, in a doleful voice—"Ah, my poor Materne! if you did but know—if you did but know!"

"Well, what? the enemy is here; he will not eat you."

"No, but they are swallowing up everything without mercy. Old Ursule, of Schlestadt, who arrived here yesterday evening, says that the Austrians will have

nothing but *knoépfe* and *noudels*, the Russians *schnaps*, and the Bavarians *sour-kROUT*. And when they've stuffed themselves with all that up to their very throats, they keep still calling out, with their mouths full: '*schokolade ! schokolade !*' My God ! my God ! how shall we feed all these people ?"

"I well know that it is very difficult," replied the old huntsman. "You can never give a jackdaw enough cheese ; but, in the first place, where are these Cossacks, these Bavarians, and these Austrians ? All the way from Grandfontaine we have not met a single one."

"They are in Alsace, round about Urmatt, and they are coming here."

"Well, in the meanwhile," said Kasper, "be so obliging as to serve us with a jug of wine ; here is a crown piece ; you can hide it easier than your barrels."

One of the girls went down into the cellar, and just at that moment several other people came in—an almanack-seller from the Strassbourg side, a waggoner in his smockfrock from Sarrebrück, and two or three of the inhabitants of Mutzig, of Hirsch, and of Schirmeck, who were escaping with their flocks and herds, and had hardly strength left to speak.

They all seated themselves at the same table, facing the window which commanded a view of the road ; wine was brought them, and each one began to relate all that he knew. One said that the Allies were so numerous that they were obliged at night time to lie down to rest side by side in the valley of Hirschenthal, and so full of vermin, that after their departure the dead leaves walked about all alone in the woods. Another, that the Cossacks had set fire to a village in Alsace, because they

had been refused candles for dessert after their dinner ; that certain of them, especially the Calmucks, ate soap like cheese, and bacon-rind like cake ; that a great number drank brandy by the pint, after having taken care to put handfuls of pepper in it ; that you must hide everything from them, for they found everything that came in their way good to eat and drink. On this, the waggoner related how that, three days since, a division of the Russian army having passed in the night under the cannon of Bitsch, it had been obliged to station itself for more than an hour on the ice in the little village of Rorbach ; and that this whole division had drunk out of a warming-pan which had been left out by mistake on the window-sill of an old woman of eighty ; that this race of savages broke the ice to bathe, and then went into brick ovens to dry themselves ; in short, that they were afraid of nothing but corporal *schlaque* !

These good people related such singular things to each other—things which they declared they had seen with their own eyes, or heard from the best authority—that it was scarcely possible to believe them.

Out of doors, the uproar, the rumbling of carts, the bellowing of the cattle, the shouts of the drovers, and clamour of the fugitives in general, continued as loud as ever, and produced the effect of an immense and universal boom. Towards noon, Materne and his sons were just going to set off, when a shout, greater and more prolonged than the others, was heard : “The Cossacks ! the Cossacks !”

Then every one rushed out except our mountaineers, who contented themselves with opening a window and looking out. Everybody fled across the fields ; men,

'ocks, vehicles, all dispersed like leaves before the winds of autumn.

In less than two minutes the road was clear, except in Schirmeck, where such uproar and confusion reigned that you could not take four steps for the crowd.

Materne, looking far down the road, exclaimed, "It's no good my looking, for I can see nothing."

"Nor I, either," replied Kasper.

"Ah! I see, I see!" pursued the old huntsman, "that the terror of all these people gives the enemy greater power than they really possess. It is not thus that we will receive the Cossacks in the mountain, as they shall find to their cost!"

Then shrugging his shoulders with an expression of contempt: "Fear is a villanous thing," said he; "for, after all, we have but a poor life to lose. Come, let us be going."

On quitting the tavern, the old man having taken the road that lay through the valley to ascend the summit of the Hirschberg, his sons followed him. They soon reached the outskirts of the wood. Materne then said that they must climb to the greatest possible height, in order to discover the plain, and bring back positive news to the camp, for that all the reports of those fugitives were not worth the testimony of a single eye-witness.

Kasper and Frantz agreed with him, and they all three began to scale the side of the mountain, which in this part formed a sort of promontory overlooking the plain.

When they had reached the summit, they saw distinctly the position of the enemy, about three leagues off, between Urmatt and Lutzelhouse; they looked like

great black lines upon the snow; farther off were to be seen some dark masses, no doubt the artillery and the baggage. Other masses were to be discerned round about the villages, and, in spite of the distance, the glitter of bayonets announced that a column had just set out on the march for Visch.

Having contemplated this picture for a long time with a thoughtful eye, the old man said: "We have down there a good thirty thousand men under our very eyes. They are advancing on our side; we shall be attacked to-morrow, or the day after, at the very latest. This will be no trifling affair, my lads; but if they've the advantage of numbers, we have in position; and then it's always best to fire on a mass; there's sure to be no balls lost."

Having made these judicious reflections, he looked up to observe at what height the sun was, and added: "It is now two o'clock; we know all we want to know. Let us return to the camp."

The two lads swung their carbines over their shoulders, and leaving on their left the valley of the Brocque, Schirmeck, and Framont, they ascended the steep acclivity of the Hengsbach, overlooked at two leagues' distance by the Little Donon. They re-descended on the other side without following any footpath through the snow, only tracing their course over the mountain tops as the shortest way to reach their journey's end.

They had proceeded thus for about two hours; the winter sun was sinking in the horizon; night was approaching; night, but bright and calm. They had now only to descend, and remount, on the other side, the solitary gorge of the Reil, forming a large circular

basin in the midst of the woods, and enclosing a little dark pool, where the wild roe sometimes came to slake their thirst.

All at once, as they were striding along, thinking of nothing in particular, the old man, suddenly stopping behind a curtain of shrubs, said, "Hush!"

And raising his hand, he pointed to the little lake, then covered with a thin and transparent coating of ice. His two boys had only to glance in that direction to witness the strangest sight. About twenty Cossacks, with rough yellow beards, their heads covered with old sealskin caps, shaped like the funnel of a stove, their lean forms clad in long tatters, their feet in stirrups made of old cords, were sitting on their little horses with long floating manes, thin tails, the crupper spotted with yellow, white, and black, like goats. Some had for sole weapon a long lance, others a sabre, others a hatchet suspended by a cord to the saddle, and a large holster pistol attached to their belt. Several, with upturned faces, were looking delightedly and admiringly at the dark green tops of the fir trees, reaching one above the other till finally lost in the clouds. One tall, bony fellow was breaking the ice with the thick end of his lance, while his little horse drank, with outstretched neck and long mane falling beardwise down each cheek. Some among them, having alighted, were clearing away the snow, and pointing to the wood, no doubt to indicate that it was a good place for encamping. Their comrades, still on horseback, were talking together, and showing on their right the bottom of the valley, lying low like a gap as far as the Grindervald.

In short, it was a halt, and it would be impossible

to describe the strange and picturesque appearance which these beings from far-off lands, with their bronzed countenances, long beards, black eyes, low foreheads, flat noses, tattered grey coats, presented on the borders of that still lake, and under those steep rocks, with their tall fir-crowned summits reaching to the skies.

It seemed like a glimpse of another and a different world to them, a species of unknown, curious, and strange game, that the three red huntsmen began to gaze upon at first with a singular curiosity. But that over, at the end of five minutes, Kasper and Frantz fixed their long bayonets at the end of their carbines, then stepped stealthily about twenty paces backwards into the covert. They reached a rock of fifteen to twenty feet high, which Materne ascended, being unarmed; then, after a few words, exchanged in a low voice, Kasper examined his priming, and slowly took aim, while his brother stood close at hand.

One of the Cossacks, the same who was letting his horse drink, was about a hundred paces off. As Kasper's shot awoke the deep echoes of the gorge, the Cossack, rolling over the head of his steed, disappeared beneath the ice of the lake. It is impossible to describe the stupefied surprise of his comrades when they heard the shot and witnessed its effect. They stared about them in every direction as the echo gradually died away, while a thick puff of smoke appeared above the cluster of trees where the huntsmen were.

Kasper, in less than a quarter of a minute, had re-loaded his gun; but, in the same space of time, the Cossacks, who had alighted, leapt upon their horses, and set off at full speed in the direction of the Hartz,

following one behind the other like roebucks, and shouting wildly, "Hurrah! hurrah!"

This flight seemed like a vision, for just as Kasper was taking aim for the second time, the tail of the last horse disappeared among the bushes.

The horse of the dead Cossack was left alone standing by the water, held there by a strange circumstance—his master, plunged headlong in the mud to the waist, had still his foot in the stirrup.

Materne, perched upon his rock, listened and then joyfully exclaimed: "They are gone! Well, let us go and see. Frantz, remain here; if some of them should return."

But in spite of this wise counsel, they all three came down to the horse; Materne immediately seized the bridle, saying, "Well, old fellow, we'll teach you to speak French."

"Come along, then," exclaimed Kasper.

"No; we must see what we have brought down. Look you, this will encourage the others; dogs are never well broke in till they have scented the game."

They then fished the dead Cossack out of the pond, and having thrown him across the horse, they began to climb the side of the Donon by a footpath so steep that Materne kept repeating, a hundred times over, "The horse will never be able to pass this way."

But the horse, lean and agile as a mountain goat, passed more easily than they, which led the old huntsman to say at length: "These Cossacks have famous horses. When I grow quite old, I shall keep this one to go hunting with. We've got a famous horse, boys; he looks like a cow, but he's got the strength of a dray-horse."

Occasionally, too, he made reflections on the Cossack : "What a droll face, eh ? a round nose, and a forehead like a cheese-box. There are, for certain, some strange fellows in the world ! You took good aim at him, Kasper ; hit him just in the middle of the chest ; and see, the ball has come out at the back. Famous powder ; Divès always keeps capital stuff."

About six o'clock they heard the first challenge of their sentinels : "Who goes there ?"

"France !" replied Materne, advancing.

Everybody ran to meet them, exclaiming, "Here is Materne !"

Hullin himself, as curious as the rest, could not help running up with Doctor Lorquin. The men were already crowding round the horse, staring at him in open-mouthed wonder, by the side of a large fire where their supper was cooking.

"It is a Cossack," said Hullin, pressing the hand of Materne.

"Yes, Jean-Claude ; we caught him just by the lake of the Riel : it was Kasper who shot him."

They placed the corpse near the fire, the bright flickering rays of which reflected fantastic shadows on his countenance, of a dingy yellow.

Doctor Lorquin, having looked at him, said, "It is a fine specimen of the Tartar race ; if I had time, I would scald him in a bath of quicklime to procure a skeleton of the tribe." Then, kneeling beside him, and opening his long grey riding-coat, "The ball has traversed the pericardium," said he ; "which produces very nearly the effect of aneurism of the heart."

The others were silent.

Kasper stood leaning on his gun, and seemingly

quite satisfied with his game; while old Materno, rubbing his hands, said, "I was sure I should bring you back something; my boys and I never come back empty-handed. And there it is!"

Hullin then drawing him apart, they entered the farm together, whilst, after the first moment of surprise, every one began to make his own personal reflections on the Cossack.



CHAPTER XIV.

THAT same night, which happened to fall on a Saturday, the little farm of the Anabaptist never ceased for a moment to be full of people coming and going.

Hullin had established his head-quarters in the large room on the ground floor, to the right of the barn, facing Framont; on the other side was the temporary hospital for the sick and wounded; the part overhead was inhabited by the people belonging to the farm.

Although the night was very calm, and innumerable stars twinkled in the clear sky, the cold was so intense that the ice was nearly an inch thick on the window panes.

Out of doors was heard the challenge of the sentinels going their rounds, and on the neighbouring mountain-tops the howlings of the wolves, who had followed our armies by hundreds since 1812. These carnivorous animals, crouching in the snow, their sharp muzzles between their paws, and hunger gnawing their vitals, called to each other from the Grosmann to the Donon with plaintive moans resembling those of the keen north wind.

Then more than one mountaineer felt himself turn pale.

"It is death that sings," thought they; "it scents the battle, and calls to us!"

The oxen lowed in the stable, and the horses stamped and plunged furiously. About thirty fires were burning around; the Anabaptist's wood-house was ravaged; log was heaped upon log, they roasted their faces, while they shivered at the back; they warmed their backs, and icicles hung from their moustaches.

Hullin alone, sitting at the large deal table, thought of everything. After the latest reports of the evening, announcing the arrival of the Cossacks at Framont, he was convinced that the first attack would take place on the morrow. He had distributed the cartridges, he had doubled the sentinels, ordered the patrols, and allotted all the posts the whole length of the defences. Every one knew beforehand the place he was to occupy. Hullin had also sent word to Piorette, to Jérôme of Saint-Quirin, and to Labarbe to despatch to him their best marksmen.

The little dark passage, lit only by a solitary lantern, was full of snow, and every moment by its dull light were seen passing the leaders of the ambuscade, their hats pulled down to their ears, the large sleeves of their riding coats drawn down to their wrists, with gloomy looks, and their beards stiff with the frost.

Pluto no longer growled at the heavy footsteps of these men. Hullin, plunged in thought, sat with his head between his hands, his elbows on the table, listening to all the reports:

"Master Jean-Claude, there is something moving to be seen in the direction of Grandfontaine; there is a sound like the trampling of horses."

"Master Jean-Claude, the brandy is frozen."

"Master Jean-Claude, there are numbers asking for powder."

“ We want this—and that.”

“ Let them keep a good look out upon Grandfontaine, and change the sentinels on that side every half-hour. Bring the brandy to the fire. Wait till Divès comes ; he will bring a fresh supply of ammunition. Distribute the rest of the cartridges, and let those who have more than twenty give some to their comrades.”

And this was how it went on all night long.

About five in the morning, Kasper, Materne's son, came to tell Hullin that Mare Divès, with a cartload of cartridges, Catherine Lefèvre in another vehicle, and a detachment from Labarbe, had just arrived together, and that they were there awaiting him.

This news pleased him greatly, especially on account of the cartridges, for he had feared the want of them might cause delay.

He rose immediately and went out with Kasper. It was a strange and singular spectacle that met his eye.

At daybreak, masses of thick fog were beginning to rise from the valley, the fires were crackling and sparkling in the mist, and people were lying sleeping about in every direction ; here lay one, his hands clasped under his head, his face purple with cold, his legs bent under him ; there another, with his cheek on his arm, and his back to the blazing fire ; the greater part were sitting, their heads hanging down, and guns slung over their shoulders—a still and silent picture, revealed either in a flood of crimson light, or half hidden in the grey tinge of morning, according as the fire burnt high or low. Farther off, in the distance, the profiles of the sentinels were sharply outlined against the pale sky, as they stood resting on their guns, looking down on the cloud-covered abyss below. To the

right, at about fifty paces from the last fire, was heard the neighing of horses, and people stamping with their feet to warm themselves, and talking loud.

"Here is Master Jean-Claude," said Kasper, advancing.

One of the men having thrown some splinters of dry wood on to the fire, there was a blaze, and by its light were seen Marc Divès's men on horseback, a dozen strapping fellows wrapped in their long grey cloaks, their broad-brimmed hats pushed back on to their shoulders, their thick moustaches either turned up, or falling down to their very necks, grouped motionless around the baggage waggon; a little farther on was Catherine Lefèvre, crouching among the packages in her cart, her feet buried in the straw, her back against a large barrel; behind her was a cauldron, a gridiron, a pig fresh killed, scalded, white and red, some ropes of onions, and heads of cabbages to make soup; all this was revealed for an instant in the shadow, and then fell back again into darkness.

Divès was a little apart from the convoy, and now rode forward on his great horse. "Is that you, Jean-Claude?"

"Yes, Marc."

"I've some thousand cartridges here. Hexe-Baizel works day and night."

"Good! Good!"

"Yes, old boy. And Catherine Lefèvre is bringing provisions, too; she killed yesterday. Where shall we put the powder?"

"Down below there; under the cart-shed, behind the farm. Ah! is that you, Catherine?"

"Yes, Jean-Claude. It is pretty cold this morning."

"You are always the same, then; you are afraid of nothing!"

"Why, should I be a woman if I were not curious? I must poke my nose into everything."

"Yes, you have always excuses to make for whatever you do that is good and right."

"Hullin, you are a babbler; have done with your compliments! Must not those people there have something to eat? Can they live on air through the winter? The open air is not very nourishing in such cold weather as this, when it's just like needles and razors! So I took my measures. Yesterday we slaughtered an ox—you know poor Schwartz—he weighed a good nine hundred weight. I've brought his hind-quarters with me to make soup this morning."

"Catherine, I shall never come to know you," cried Jean-Claude, quite touched; "you always surprise me. Nothing is too much for you; neither money, nor pains, nor trouble."

"Ah!" replied the old woman, rising and jumping out of her cart, "do stop; you bother me, Hullin. I will warm myself."

She threw her horse's reins to Dubourg; then turning, said:—"Anyhow, Jean-Claude, those fires are delightful to look at. But Louise, where is she?"

"Louise has passed the night in cutting out and sewing bandages, with Pelsly's two daughters. She is at the hospital, down below there, where my light is shining."

"Poor child!" said Catherine, "I will run and help her, that will warm me."

At this moment, Divès and his men were taking the powder to the cart-house, and as Jean-Claude ap-

proached the nearest fire, what was not his surprise to see among those surrounding it, the fool Yégof, with his crown on his head, gravely seated on a stone, his feet on the embers, and with his rags draped around him like a royal mantle. Nothing more singular can be imagined than the appearance of this strange figure in the fire-light. Yégof was the only one of the number who was awake, and he might really have been taken for some barbarous king, musing in the midst of his sleeping horde of savages.

Hullin, for his part, saw only a fool, and gently touching his shoulder: "How are you, Yégof?" said he, in an ironical tone; "you have come, then, to lend the succour of your invincible arm, and your innumerable armies!"

The fool, without betraying the least surprise, replied: "That depends upon you, Hullin; your own fate, with every one else's, is in your hands. Here are we, just as we were sixteen hundred years ago, on the eve of a great battle. Then I, the leader of so many peoples, I came to your khan to demand the passage."

"Sixteen hundred years ago!" said Hullin; "what the deuce, Yégof, that makes us terribly old! But, after all, what does it matter? Every one has his own notion of things."

"Yes," replied the fool, "but, with your usual obstinacy, you would not listen to anything. The dead lay in heaps on the Blutfeld, and those dead cry aloud for vengeance!"

"Ah! the Blutfeld," said Jean-Claude; "yes, yes, it's an old story; I think I've heard tell of it."

Yégof's brow grew crimson; his eyes flashed fire. "You boast of your victory!" he exclaimed, "but take

care, take care: blood calls for blood." Then, in a gentler tone: "Listen," added he, "I wish you no ill: you are brave; the children of your race may mingle with those of mine."

"Ah! now he is coming back again to Louise," thought Jean-Claude; and, anticipating a formal demand: "Yégof," said he, "I am sorry, but I must leave you; I have so many things to see to——"

The fool did not wait the end of this leave-taking, and rising with his face convulsed with rage: "You refuse me your daughter!" he exclaimed, pointing upwards with a solemn air. "And it is for the third time! Beware! Beware!"

Hullin, despairing of making him listen to reason, hastily withdrew; but the fool, in furious accents, addressed to him as he went these strange words:

"Huldrix, woe to thee! Thy last hour is near. Wolves will feast again upon thy flesh. All is over. I let loose upon thee the tempests of my rage. For thee and thine let there be neither grace, nor pity, nor mercy. Thou hast willed it so." And, throwing a portion of his ragged robe over his left shoulder, he strode rapidly away towards the summit of the Donon.

Several of the mountaineers, half awakened by his cries, watched him with a dull eye as his retreating form disappeared in the darkness; they heard a sound like the flapping of wings; then, as in the vision of a dream, they turned round, and went to sleep again.

About an hour after, Lagarmitte's horn sounded the *reveille*. In a few seconds, every one was up and stirring.

The leaders of the ambuscade assembled their men. Some proceeded towards the cart-house, and distributed the cartridges; while others filled their flasks with

brandy from the barrel. All this was done with the utmost order; then each division repaired, with its leader at its head, in the early twilight, towards the barricades on the mountain side.

When the sun appeared, all round the farm was silent and deserted, and with the exception of five or six fires, which were still smoking, there was nothing to announce that the volunteers occupied every point of the mountain, and that they had passed the night in that spot. Hullin then took a snack, and drank a glass of wine with his friends, Doctor Lorquin and the Anabaptist, Pelsly. Lagarmitte was with them, for he was to remain with Jean-Claude all the day, and transmit his orders in case of need.



CHAPTER XV.

SEVEN o'clock, and yet not the slightest movement was perceptible in the valley. From time to time Doctor Lorquin would throw up the sash of a window in the house-room, and look out; there was nothing stirring; the fires were out; all was still and silent.

Opposite the farm, about a hundred paces off, on a sloping wall, lay the Cossack shot the evening before by Kasper; he was white as snow, and hard as a flint.

Within doors, a large fire was burning brightly in the stove. Louise was sitting beside her father, and regarding him with a look of ineffable sweetness; it seemed as if she feared she might never see him again; her red eyes betrayed that she had just been shedding tears. Hullin, though firm, seemed greatly moved.

The doctor and the Anabaptist, both grave and solemn, were talking of present affairs, and Lagarmitte was listening to them attentively.

"We have not only the right, but it is also our duty, to defend ourselves," the doctor was saying; "these woods were laid out and cultivated by our fathers; they are our lawful property."

"No doubt," replied the Anabaptist, in a sententious tone; "but it is written, 'Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not shed thy brother's blood.'"

Catherine Lefèvre, who was just at that time busy with a rasher of ham, and who was doubtless tired of this discussion, turned sharply round, and replied, "Which means that, if we were of your religion, the Germans, the Russians, and all the other red men would be allowed to have everything their own way. Yours is a famous religion ; yes, famous for such scum as those ! It gives them the license to rob and plunder all who are better off than themselves. The Allies would like us to have such a one, no doubt ! Unluckily, every one is not of the same opinion. We are not all like sheep, ready for the slaughter ; and I, for one, Pelsly, without meaning any offence to you, think it is rather stupid to fatten oneself for the good of others. For all that, you are worthy people, no doubt ; no one can say to the contrary ; you have been reared from father to son in the same ideas : like father, like son. But we intend to defend ourselves, in spite of you ; and when all is over, you shall make us speeches on the subject of eternal peace. I am very fond of listening to lectures on peace when I've nothing else to do, and am sitting by the fire after dinner ; it does me good to hear them."

Having spoken in this way, she turned to the fire, and went on quietly cooking her ham.

Pelsly remained staring open-mouthed at her, and Doctor Lorquin could not restrain a smile.

At the same moment, the door opened, and one of the sentinels on duty outside called out : "Master Jean-Claude, come and see ; I think they are on the alert."

"All right, Simon, I am coming," said Hullin, rising. "Louise, kiss me ; courage, my child ; do not be afraid ; all will go well."

He pressed her to his breast, his eyes swimming with

tears. For her part, she seemed more dead than alive. "And above all," said the worthy man, addressing Catherine, "let nobody go out, and let none approach the windows."

Then he rushed hastily forth.

All the spectators had turned pale.

When Master Jean-Claude had reached the edge of the terrace, casting his eyes over Grandfontaine and Framont, which lay about nine thousand feet below him, this is what he saw.

The Germans arrived the evening before, some hours after the Cossacks, having passed the night, to the number of five or six thousand, in the barns, stables, and out-houses, were now bustling and hurrying about in all directions. It was a regular ant-hill. They were issuing from every door in files of ten, fifteen, and twenty, hastening to buckle on their knapsacks, hook on their swords, and fix their bayonets.

Others, horsemen, Cossacks, hussars in green, grey, and blue uniforms, trimmed with red and yellow; caps of oil-skin, sheepskin, shakos, and helmets, were saddling their horses, and hastily rolling up their large holsters.

The officers, their cloaks flung over their arms, were descending the little narrow stairs, some with upturned heads scanning the country round, others kissing the women on the threshold of the houses they were leaving.

The trumpeters, one hand resting on their hips, the other elbow aloft, were sounding the rappel at every corner of the street; the drummers were tightening the cords of their drums. In short, in this space, which, seen from a distance, looked like a hand's-breadth,

might be seen every description of military attitude at the moment of departure.

Some peasants, leaning out of their windows, were watching all this ; the women showed themselves at the windows of the lofts. The innkeepers were busy filling flasks, corporal *schlague** standing beside them.

Hullin had a quick eye, nothing escaped him : he took in all this at a glance, and besides, he had been used to this sort of thing for many a long year ; but Lagarmitte, who had never seen anything of the kind before, was stupefied with surprise :

“ There are a good many of them ! ” said he, shaking his head.

“ Ah ! bah ! what does that prove ? ” said Hullin. “ In my time, we have exterminated three armies of fifty thousand of the same race, in six months ; we were not one against four. All those you see there would not have made our breakfast. And besides, you may make your mind easy, we shall not need to kill them all ; they’ll fly before us like hares. I’ve seen that before now ! ”

After these sage reflections, he judged it prudent to go and inspect his company again.

“ Come on ! ” said he to the shepherd.

They both then, advancing behind the barricades, shaped their course along a path cut through the snow two days before. These snows, hardened by the frost, were now become as solid and firm as ice. The trees, as they lay in front all covered with hoar-frost, formed an impenetrable barrier, which extended for about six hundred metres. The road lay hollowed out below.

As he approached, Jean-Claude saw the mountaineers

* Drum-major.

of the Dagsberg, crouching at intervals of twenty paces in a sort of round nests which they had dug out for themselves.

All these brave fellows were sitting on their knapsacks, their flask on their right, their hats, or fox-skin caps, pushed to the back of their necks, their guns between their knees. They had only to rise in order to see the road at fifty paces beneath them, at the foot of a slippery descent.

They were delighted to see Hullin.

"Eh! Master Jean-Claude, is it going to begin soon?"

"Yes, my lads; don't be afraid; before an hour we shall be hard at it."

"Ah! So much the better!"

"Yes, but above all, mind your aim; breast high; don't be in a hurry; and be careful to show no more flesh than is necessary."

"Never fear, Master Jean-Claude."

He went farther on; everywhere he was received in the same way.

"Do not forget," said he, "to stop firing when Lagarmitte sounds his horn. We must have no waste of powder and shot."

When he came up with old Materne, who commanded all these men, to the number of about two hundred and fifty, he found the old huntsman just preparing to smoke a pipe, his nose as red as a live coal, and his beard bristling with cold like a wild boar.

"Ah! is that you, Jean-Claude?"

"Yes, I've come to shake hands with you."

"All right; but tell me—they seem in no hurry to come—if they should happen to pass another way?"

"No fear of that. They must take this road for the artillery and baggage. Hark ! there's the bugle—to boot and saddle !"

"Yes, I saw that before ; they are preparing." Then, with a low chuckle :

"You don't know, Jean-Claude, just now, as I was looking towards Grandfontaine, what a droll thing I saw."

"What was that, old boy ?"

"I saw four Germans lay hold of the fat Dubreuil, the friend of the Allies ; they laid him down on the stone bench at his door, and one tall bony fellow gave him I don't know how many blows with a stout stick over his back. Didn't he bellow, the old rascal ! I'll wager he has refused something to his good friends ; his old wine of the year 1811, for instance."

Hullin listened no further, for happening to cast a glance down upon the valley, he had just seen a regiment of infantry debouch on the road. Farther off, in the street, the cavalry were advancing, with five or six officers galloping at their head.

"Ah ! ha ! they are coming now in good earnest," exclaimed the old soldier, whose countenance suddenly assumed an expression of energy and strange enthusiasm.

Then he sprang upon the trench, exclaiming :

"My children, attention !"

As he passed, he caught a glimpse of Riffi, the little tailor of the Charmes, leaning upon a long gun ; the little man had made a step in the snow to take aim. Higher up he recognised also the old wood-cutter, Rochart, with his big sabots trimmed with sheepskin ; he was taking a hearty draught from his

flask, and then slowly raising himself up, with his carbine under his arm, and his cotton cap over his ear.

And that was all; for in order to survey the whole sphere of action, it was necessary for him to climb to the summit of the Donon, where there is a rock.

Lagarmitte followed him, stretching out his long legs as if he were walking on stilts. Ten minutes after, when they had arrived quite out of breath at the top of the rock, they perceived at four thousand odd feet below them the enemy's column of about three thousand men, with long white coats, cloth gaiters, tall shakos, and red moustaches; the young officers with flat cap, riding at regular distances among the troops, caracoling on horse-back, sword in hand, and turning round from time to time to call out, in a shrill voice: "*Forvertz! Forvertz!*" (Forward! Forward!)

And this body bristled with glittering bayonets and advanced at full charge towards the barricades.

Old Materne, his long hawk's nose peering over the branch of a juniper tree, had also observed, with raised eyebrows, the arrival of the Germans. And as he was very clear-sighted, he was able even to distinguish faces among all this crowd; and picked out the one whom he would bring down himself.

In the middle of the column, mounted on a tall bay horse, there came riding straight towards them an old officer with a white wig, three-cornered lace hat, his form enveloped in a yellow mantle, and his breast decorated with orders. When this personage raised his head, the corner of his hat, surmounted by a tuft of black feathers, formed a target. He had long wrinkles in his cheeks, and seemed to be no chicken.

"That's my man!" said the old huntsman to himself, taking aim leisurely.

He cocked his gun, fired, and when he looked, the old officer had disappeared.

Immediately the mountain-side was ablaze with shots the whole length of the entrenchments; but the Germans, without answering, continued to advance towards the entrenchments, gun on shoulder, and keeping the ranks as steadily as if they were on parade.

If the truth must be told, more than one brave mountaineer, the father of a family, when he saw that forest of bayonets which kept on advancing up the mountain, in spite of the shots that were poured on them, began to think that he might perhaps have done better to stay at home in his village than to thrust himself into such an affair. But as the proverb says: "The wine is drawn; it must be drunk!"

Riffi, the little tailor, bethought him of the prudent warning of his wife, Sapience: "Riffi, you will get lamed for life, and that will be a pretty job!"

He promised a superb offering to the chapel of St. Léon if he came back safe and sound from the war; but at the same time he resolved to make good use of his long gun.

Two hundred paces from the barricades the Germans halted and opened a running fire such as had never before been heard on the mountain: it was a regular buzz of shots; balls by hundreds hacked down the branches, made bits of ice leap up in all directions, came crashing down upon the rocks, to the right, to the left, before, behind. They came hissing and whistling through the air at times as thick as a flock of pigeons.

This did not prevent the mountaineers from keeping

up their fire, but it could no longer be heard. All the mountain-side was wrapped in a bluish smoke which made it difficult to take aim.

At the end of about ten minutes, the roll of the drum was heard, and all that mass of men began to charge at the abattis, officers as well as others, shouting "*Forvertz!*"

The ground trembled beneath them.

Materne, drawing himself up to his full height, by the side of the trench, with a voice terrible in its emotion, cried, "Up! Up!"

It was time, for a good number of those Germans, almost all of them students of philosophy, law, or medicine, scarred in skirmishes at Munich, Jena, and elsewhere, and who fought against us because they had been promised that their liberties should be granted them after the downfall of Napoleon; all these intrepid young fellows began to crawl on all-fours over the ice, and attempted to leap into the entrenchments.

But as fast as they climbed up the sides of the mountains, they were stunned with the butt-ends of the guns, and fell back among their ranks like hail.

It was at this juncture that there was witnessed an act of bravery on the part of the old wood-cutter, Rochart. Singlehanded he overthrew more than ten of those sons of old Germany. Seizing them under the arms, he flung them back upon the road. Old Materne had his bayonet reeking with blood. And the little tailor Riffi kept incessantly reloading his great gun, and firing energetically upon the heaving, struggling crowd below; and Joseph Larnette, who unfortunately received a shot in the eye; Hans Baumgarten, who had his shoulder fractured; Daniel Spitz, who lost two

fingers by a sword-thrust; and a crowd of others whose names will be honoured and revered from generation to generation, never ceased for one second to load and discharge their guns.

Below, nothing was heard but fearful shouts and cries; and above, nothing was to be seen but bristling bayonets, and men on horseback.

This state of things lasted a good quarter of an hour; no one knew what the Germans intended to do, since they could not clear a passage. Nearly all the students had fallen, and the others, old campaigners, used to honourable retreats, did not throw themselves into the fray with the same ardour.

They began by beating a retreat, slowly; then more quickly. The officers, behind them, struck them with the flat of their swords; shots came whizzing after them, and finally, they fled with as much precipitation as they had advanced in good order.

Materne, standing erect upon his eminence, with fifty others round him, brandished his carbine, laughing heartily.

At the foot of the ascent heaps of the wounded were dragging themselves painfully along. The trampled snow was red with blood. In the midst of the heaps of dead were to be seen two young officers, still alive, but crushed and entangled under the corpses of their horses.

It was a horrible sight! But men are really ferocious; there was not one among the mountaineers who pitied these unfortunates; on the contrary, the more of them they saw, the more rejoiced they were.

The little tailor, Riffi, at this moment, flushed with a noble enthusiasm, let himself slide down the whole



"AS THEY CLIMBED UP THEY WERE BRAINED."

length of the steep ascent. He had just perceived, a little to the left, below the barricades, a superb horse, that of the colonel shot by Materne, and which was standing quietly in a corner, safe and sound.

"You shall be mine," said he to himself; "won't Sapience be astonished, that's all!"

All the others envied him. He seized the horse by the bridle, and got upon his back. But judge of the general astonishment, and that of Riffi above all, when the noble animal set off at full gallop towards his friends the Germans.

The little tailor raised his hands to heaven, invoking all the saints.

Materne had half a mind to fire, but he was afraid, as the horse was going at such a furious pace.

They were no sooner in the midst of the enemy's bayonets than Riffi vanished out of sight.

Every one thought he had been massacred; an hour after, however, they saw him passing down the principal street of Grandfontaine with his hands tied behind his back, and corporal *schlague* behind him with his uplifted cane.

Poor Riffi! he alone was not fated to share in the day's triumph; and his comrades were even led to laugh at his unhappy fate, just as if it had happened to a *Kaiserlick*.

Such is the nature of men; provided they are happy themselves, the misery of others concerns them but little.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE mountaineers were almost beside themselves with joy at their victory; they wrung each other's hands, lauded each other to the skies, and looked upon themselves as the most renowned of heroes.

Catherine, Louise, Doctor Lorquin, every one had gone out of the farm, shouting, congratulating themselves, looking at the traces of the balls, the mounds blackened by the powder; then at Joseph Larnette, with his fractured skull, lying extended in his trench; Baumgarten, with his arm hanging helpless by his side, on his way to the hospital, looking as pale as death; and Daniel Spitz, who, in spite of his sword-cut, wanted to stay and go on fighting; but the doctor would not listen to this, and forced him to return to the farm.

Louise came with the little cart and distributed brandy to the combatants; and Catherine Lefèvre, on the edge of the ascent, stood looking upon the dead and wounded lying thickly scattered along the road, which was tracked with their blood. There they lay, poor fellows, young and old, all heaped indiscriminately together, with faces as white as wax, eyes staring wide open, and outstretched arms. Some few tried to rise, and instantly fell heavily back; others were looking upwards, as if they were still afraid of being shot at; while some again were dragging themselves slowly along to get under shelter from the balls.

Several seemed resigned to their fate, and only seeking a quiet place to die in, or else straining their eyes after their regiment returning to Framont; that regiment, with which they had quitted their native village, with which they had first made a long campaign, and which was now abandoning them to die!

“Our comrades will see old Germany again,” thought they; “and when the captain or the sergeant is asked, ‘Did you know such a one: Hans, Kasper, Nickel of the 1st or 2nd company?’ they will answer, ‘Stay—it’s very likely—had he not a scar on the ear, or on the cheek? Fair or brown hair, five or six feet in height? Yes, I know him. He is left in France, by the side of a little village whose name I don’t remember. The mountaineers massacred him on the same day as the big major Yéri Peter; he was a brave lad. And so good night.’”

Perhaps, among the number, there might have been one who thought of his mother; of a pretty girl in his own country, Gretchen or Lotchen, who had given him a riband while crying her eyes out as he was setting off. “I shall wait for your coming back, Kasper; I shall never marry any one but you!” Ah, my poor lass, you will have to wait a long while!

It was not a pleasant sight to look upon, and as Dame Lefèvre beheld it, she thought of her own Gaspard.

Hullin, who had just arrived with Lagarmitte, called out, in a jovial tone:

“Well, my lads, you have smelt powder; a thousand thunders! This will do. The Germans have nothing to boast of in this day’s work.”

Then he embraced Louise, and ran to Dame Lefèvre.

“Are you contented, Catherine? Things are going

well with us. But what's the matter ? I see no smile on your face."

"Yes, Jean-Claude, everything is going as well as can be. I am contented ; but just look down on the road there ! What frightful slaughter !"

"It is war," was Hullin's grave reply.

"Is there no way of bringing up here that boy who is looking at us with his large blue eyes ? It wrings my heart to see him ; or that tall, dark one, who is binding up his leg with his handkerchief ?"

"Impossible, Catherine ; it grieves me, too ; but we should have to cut steps in the ice to descend to them, and then the Germans, who will be sure to be back in an hour or two, would follow us by them. Come away. We must announce the victory to all the villages round ; to Labarbe, to Jérôme, to Piorrette. Here, Simon, Niklo, Marchal, come here ; you must set off at once to carry the great news to our comrades. Materne, you keep a sharp look-out, and at the slightest movement, let me know."

As they drew near the farm, Jean-Claude saw the reserve body, with Marc Divès on horseback in the midst of his men. The smuggler was complaining bitterly of having been left, as he called it, to fold his arms and do nothing. He looked upon himself as dishonoured, for having borne no part in the late fray.

"Bah !" said Hullin, "so much the better ; and besides, you are protecting us on our right. Just look down below there. If we are attacked in that direction, you shall march to the defence."

Divès said nothing ; his face wore an expression at once sad and indignant ; and his tall followers, wrapped in their cloaks, with their long rapiers suspended out-

side, did not seem to be in a bit better humour: they looked as if they were plotting vengeance.

Hullin, not being able to console them, entered the farm. Doctor Lorquin was just beginning the operation of extracting the ball from the wound of Baumgarten, who was groaning fearfully.

Pelsly, standing on the threshold of his house, was trembling from head to foot. Jean-Claude begged him to supply him with paper and ink, in order that he might despatch his orders throughout the mountain-side; but it was with difficulty that the poor Anabaptist could comply with his request, so great was his agitation.

He managed it, however, at last, and messengers set off in all directions, quite proud of being deputed to announce the first battle and the victory.

A few mountaineers, who had come into the large room, were warming themselves by the stove, and talking in an excited manner. Daniel Spitz had already undergone the amputation of his two fingers, and was sitting behind the stove, with his hand bound up in linen.

Those who had been posted behind the barricades before daybreak, not having breakfasted, were then getting a crust and a mug of wine, shouting, gesticulating, and bragging with their mouths full. Some were going out to cast a look upon the trenches, others coming back to warm themselves, and everybody, in speaking of Riffi, and his dismal lamentations on horse-back, and his plaintive cries and entreaties, laughed till their sides ached.

It was eleven o'clock. These comings and goings lasted till noon, the moment when Marc Divès suddenly entered, exclaiming, "Hullin! where is Hullin?"

“Here I am.”

There was something strange in the tone of the smuggler's voice; just before furious at not having taken his part in the struggle, he seemed triumphant. Jean-Claude followed him, greatly alarmed, and the large room was cleared in an instant, for every one was convinced, by Marc's excited manner, that something serious had happened.

To the right of the Donon extends the ravine of the Minières, where rages a torrent when the snow begins to melt: it descends from the top of the mountain to the bottom of the valley.

Just opposite the plateau defended by the mountaineers, and on the other side of the ravine, at a distance of five or six hundred yards, is a sort of uncovered terrace, with a very steep descent, which Hullin had not judged necessary to occupy provisionally, not wishing to divide his forces; and seeing, besides, that it would be easy for him to strengthen this position by means of fir trees, and defend it in the event of the enemy showing signs of attacking it.

Judge, then, of the consternation of the brave man, when, on reaching the threshold of the farm, he saw two companies of Germans climbing up by this side, in the middle of the Gardens of Grandfontaine, with two field-pieces drawn on heavy carriages, and seemingly suspended over the precipice. All were pushing hard at the wheels, and in a few moments more the cannons would reach the platform. It was like a thunderbolt to Jean-Claude; he turned pale, and then went in a fearful rage with Divès. “Could you not have warned me sooner?” he roared. “Did I not bid you, above all things, to keep a good look-out on the ravine? We

are surprised; they will take us in flank; cut off the road. Everything is gone to the devil!"

The spectators, and old Materne himself, who had just run to the spot in the utmost haste, trembled at the glance he threw upon the smuggler.

The latter, in spite of his wonted boldness, stood speechless and chapfallen, not knowing what answer to make. "Come, come, Jean-Claude," said he, at length; "be calm; it is not as bad as you think. We've not had our turn yet, we fellows. And then, we're in want of cannon; it's just the very thing for us."

"Yes, just the very thing indeed, you great fool! It was your vanity that made you wait till the last moment, wasn't it? You wanted to fight, to be able to swagger and boast; and, to gain your ends, you risk the lives of us all. See! look! there are others already preparing to set out from Framont."

True enough, another column, much stronger than the first, was then leaving Framont, and advancing, at the double, towards the defences. Divès said not a word. Hullin, governing his anger, grew suddenly calm in the presence of such imminent danger.

"Go back to your posts," said he to the spectators, in a sharp voice; "let every one be ready for the attack which is preparing. Materne, attention!"

The old huntsman bowed.

Meanwhile, Marc Divès had recovered his self-possession. "Instead of brawling like a woman," said he, "you would do better to give me the order to begin the attack down below there by defending the ravine by the fir-trees."

"It must be so—a thousand thunders!" replied Jean-Claude. And then, in a calmer tone: "Listen,

Marc ; I'm in a furious rage with you. We were conquerors, and through your fault we've lost all our ground. If you miss your blow, we'll cut our throats together."

"Agreed. The affair is settled ; I'll answer for the consequences."

Then, leaping on to his horse, and throwing the skirt of his cloak over his shoulder, he drew his long rapier with a haughty and defiant air. His men followed his example closely. Then Divès, turning towards the reserve, composed of fifty stalwart mountaineers, pointed to the platform with the point of his sword, and said : "You see that, my lads ; we want that position. The men of Dagsburg must never be able to say that they showed more pluck than those of the Sarre. Forward !"

And the troops, full of martial ardour, set out on their march along the edge of the ravine. Hullin, pale with excitement, shouted, "Fix bayonets !"

The tall smuggler, on his immense brown horse, with muscular and shining croup, turned round, while a smile curled his lip under his thick moustaches ; he poised his rapier with a look full of meaning, and the whole troop plunged into the thick fir forest. At the same moment, the Germans, with their eight-pounders, attained the height and began to place their battery, whilst the column from Framont was scaling the side. All was, therefore, in the same position as before the battle ; with this difference, that the enemy's cannonballs were going to be concerned in the affray, and take the mountaineers from behind.

The two field-pieces were distinctly visible, with their cramp-irons, levers, drags, artillerymen, and command-

ing officer, a tall, bony, broad-shouldered man, with long, light, waving moustaches. The azure vault of the valley brought far-off things so near, that you might have thought him within arm's length; but Hullin and Materne knew better; there were a good six hundred yards between them; no gun could reach as far as that.

Nevertheless, the old huntsman, before returning to the barricades, wished to have a clear conscience. So he advanced as near as possible to the ravine, followed by his son Kasper and a few mountaineers, and leaning against a tree, he slowly took aim at the tall officer with light moustaches.

All those who saw him held their breath, for fear of disturbing him, and marring his aim.

The shot winged its way through the air, and when Materne leaned the butt-end of his gun upon the ground to see what had happened, no change had taken place. "It is astonishing how age dims the sight," said he.

"You! your sight dimmed!" exclaimed Kasper; "there is not one, from the Vosges to Switzerland, who can boast of sending a ball, at two hundred yards, as well as you!"

The old forester knew it well, but he did not want to discourage the others. "Perhaps so," he replied; "we have no time to discuss that now. Here comes the enemy; let each man do his duty."

In spite of these words, Materne, to all appearance simple and calm, inwardly felt great anxiety. As he entered the trench, confused sounds reached his ear; the clashing of arms, the regular tramp of footsteps: he looked down over the side of the ascent, and beheld the

Germans, this time coming with long ladders, furnished with grappling-irons.

This was a disagreeable sight for the old huntsman. He signed to his son to approach him, and whispered to him: "Kasper, this is bad, this is very bad; the beggars have brought scaling-ladders with them. Give me your hand. I would wish to have you near me, and Frantz also; but we will defend our lives as best we may. If we come off with whole skins, so much the better."

At this moment a terrible shock shook all the barricades to their foundations; a hoarse voice was heard to exclaim, "Oh! my God!"

Then a heavy sound not a hundred paces off. A fir-tree bent slowly forward, and fell right down into the abyss below.

It was the first cannon-shot: it had carried away with it both the legs of old Rochart. This shot was followed almost at the same moment by another, which came crashing along, covering in its headlong course all the mountaineers with splinters of ice; Old Materne himself bent beneath the force of this terrific explosion, but immediately recovering himself, he shouted: "Let us avenge ourselves, lads! They are here! Let us conquer or die!"

Fortunately, the panic of the mountaineers lasted but a second; they all felt that a moment's hesitation, and they were lost. Two scaling-ladders were already having their grappling-irons fixed to the side of the mountain in spite of the heavy fire poured on the assailants. This sight brought every one to the trench, and the combat was renewed more fiercely—more desperately than at the first attack.

Hullin had remarked the ladders before Materne, and

his indignation against Divès was increased by the sight; but as, in such a case, indignation is of no earthly use whatever, he had despatched Lagarmitte to desire Frantz Materne, who was posted on the other side of the Donon, to come to him with all haste with half of his men. I leave you to imagine whether the brave lad, forewarned of the danger his father was running, lost a second in obeying the order. Already the broad felt hats were seen ascending the mountain's side through the snow, the men with their carbines slung over their shoulders. They were running as fast as they could, and yet Jean-Claude, hastening to meet them, with the large drops of sweat standing on his forehead, and his eye wild and haggard, shouted to them, in a ringing voice: "Come on, there, quicker! you will never get here at that rate."

He was actually trembling with rage, attributing the whole misfortune to the smuggler.

In the meanwhile, Mark Divès, at the end of about half an hour, had made the round of the ravine, and from the back of his tall horse was just beginning to discover the two companies of Germans with grounded arms, a hundred paces behind the guns, which were firing on the entrenchments. Then, approaching the mountaineers, he said to them, in a stifled voice, while the explosions of the cannon were awakening every echo in the gorge, and in the distance the clamours of the assault resounded: "Comrades, you will charge the infantry with fixed bayonets; I and my men will undertake the rest. Is that understood?"

"Yes, that's understood."

"Well, then, forward!"

The whole body advanced in good order towards the

outskirts of the wood, with the tall Piercy of Soldatenthal at their head. Nearly at the same instant there was the "*verda*" (challenge) of a sentinel ; then two shots ; then a great shout, "Hurrah for France !" and the heavy dull sound of rushing footsteps ; the brave mountaineers were falling upon the enemy like a troop of wolves !

Divès, standing upright in his stirrups, with his long nose and bristling moustaches, was laughingly looking on :

"It's all right," he kept saying to himself.

It was a fearful conflict ; the ground trembled under it. The Germans were not, any more than the confederates, opening fire ; all was passing in silence ; the clashing of bayonets, the heavy thud of the musket-stocks, intermingled from time to time by a shot, cries of rage, groans, tumult ; nothing else was heard.

The smugglers, with outstretched necks, sword in hand, sniffed the carnage, impatiently awaiting the signal from their leader.

"Now it is our turn," said Marc. "The cannon be our prize !"

And forth from the woody fastnesses, with their long cloaks floating behind them like wings, leaning eagerly forward on their saddles, and their swords poised, onward they came, rushing like the wind.

"Don't cut—stab, stab," said Marc.

And this was every word he uttered.

In a second the twelve vultures had swooped down upon the guns. There were among the number four old Spanish dragoons, and two ex-cuirassiers of the Guard, whom the taste for danger attached to Marc. Blows

from every imaginable weapon that the artillerymen had at hand, rained round them as thick as hail. They were all parried beforehand, and every stroke brought a man down.

Marc Divès met the fire of two pistols full in his face; one of the shots blackened his left cheek, and the other carried away his hat. He, bending over his saddle, with his long arm outstretched, pinned at the same moment the tall officer with light moustaches to one of the guns.

To conceive the effect of this terrible scene, we must picture to ourselves the deadly conflict on the heights of the Minières; the groans of the dying, the neighing of the horses, the cries of rage, the flight of some, casting away their weapons to run more quickly, the savage ardour of others.

Marc Divès was not of a contemplative turn: he did not waste time in making poetical reflections on the tumult and senseless fury of the wars men wage with each other. He saw the situation at a glance, and leaping from his horse, flung himself upon the first cannon, still loaded, seized the levers of the gun-carriage to change its direction, levelled it at the foot of the ladders, and, snatching a match which was smoking on the ground, fired.

Then at a distance arose strange clamours, and the smuggler, through the smoke, saw a bloody gap in the enemy's ranks.

"Now on, boys," said he to his men, "we must not sleep upon it. A cartridge here; a ball, some turf: we'll sweep the road. Look out!"

The smugglers took up their position; and the fire

was kept up upon the white uniforms with untiring zeal. Volleys of bullets whizzed through their ranks. At the tenth discharge there was a general rout.

About six hundred men perished on that day. There were mountaineers, and there were *Kaiserlicks* in far greater numbers ; but had it not been for the cannonade of Divès all would have been lost.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE Germans, driven back in multitudes upon Grandfontaine, fled in bands in the direction of Framont, on foot and on horseback, hurrying along, dragging with them their baggage, throwing their knapsacks across the road, and then looking behind them as if they feared to see the mountaineers at their heels.

In Grandfontaine they destroyed everything they could lay their hands on, out of a spirit of revenge; they smashed the windows and doors, insulted the inhabitants, demanded to be supplied with food and drink on the spot, and outraged the women. Their shouts, their imprecations, the authoritative commands of their leaders, the complaints of the citizens, the heavy, incessant tread of footsteps on the bridge of Framont, the shrill neighings of the wounded horses, all reached the barricades in one confused, mingled sound.

On the mountain-side nothing was to be seen but arms, shakos, and dead bodies; in short, all the signs of a great defeat. Opposite appeared the cannons taken by Marc Divès, pointed over the valley, and ready to fire in case of a fresh attack.

All was then over—quite over. And yet not a single cry of triumph rose from the entrenchments. The losses the mountaineers had sustained in this last assault had been too severe and cruel. There was something solemn

in this deep silence succeeding to the tumult; and all those men who had escaped the carnage looked at one another with grave faces as if they were surprised at seeing each other. Some called to a friend, others to a brother, who did not answer. They would then begin to search in the trench, along the barricades, or on the ascent, crying as they did it, "Ho! Jacob, Philip!—is it you?"

And then night came, and its grey shadows spread over entrenchments and abyss, adding the horror of mystery to scenes already terrible enough.

Materne, after having wiped his bayonet, called his sons to him in hoarse accents:

"Ho! Kasper! Frantz!"

And seeing forms approaching in the darkness, he began to ask:

"Is it you?"

"Yes, it is us."

"Nothing wrong with you?"

"No."

The old huntsman's voice, usually so rough, trembled like a woman's.

"Here we are all three, then, together again!" said he, in a low tone.

And he, whom no one had ever accused of being soft-hearted, bestowed a hearty embrace upon his sons, who were greatly surprised by his emotion. They heard a sound in his breast as of inward sobbing; they were much moved by it, and said to themselves: "How he loves us! We should never have believed this!"

They themselves felt touched to the very quick.

But in a short time, the old man, recovering himself, exclaimed:

"All the same, this has been a tough day's work, boys. Let us go and have a cup of wine, for I'm thirsty."

Then casting a last look on the gloomy scene, and seeing the sentinels which Hullin, as he went by, had just posted at every thirty paces, they proceeded together towards the old farm.

They were crossing the trench, where the dead lay in heaps, lifting their feet whenever they felt them come in contact with anything soft, when they heard a stifled voice say :

"Is that you, Materne?"

"Ah, my poor old Rochart!—pardon, pardon!" replied the old huntsman, stooping down. "I touched you. What! are you there still?"

"Yes, I cannot move, for I have lost my legs."

They were all three silent for a moment, and then the old wood-cutter resumed :

"Tell my wife that she will find behind the wardrobe my little savings, put away in a stocking. I hoarded it up in case we should either of us fall ill. For me, I have no more need of it."

"That we shall see, we shall see;—you may recover yet—poor old fellow! We will carry you away."

"No; it's not worth the trouble; I've only an hour longer to live; it would only put me to pain."

Materne, without answering, made a sign to Kasper to form a litter with his carbine and his own, and Frantz to place the old wood-cutter upon it, in spite of his remonstrances. Which was immediately done. And in this manner they all arrived at the farm together.

All the wounded who, during the combat, had had

strength to drag themselves to the hospital, had repaired thither. Doctor Lorquin and his assistant, Despois, who had arrived during the day, were up to their ears in work, and still all was not nearly finished, so much was there to do.

As Materne, with his sons and old Rochart, were crossing the dark alley by the light of the lantern, they heard on their left a groan which froze the very marrow in their bones, and the old wood-cutter, half-dead as he was, exclaimed:

"Oh! why do you bring me here? I will not—no, I won't! I would rather die at once!"

"Open the door, Frantz," said Materne, while a cold sweat stood upon his face—"open, make haste!"

And Frantz having pushed the door, they saw on a long kitchen table in the centre of the low apartment, with heavy brown rafters, young Colard, stretched at full length, three candles on each side of him, a man at each arm, and a bucket just under him. Doctor Lorquin, his shirt-sleeves turned up to his elbows, a short saw about three fingers broad in his hand, was just preparing to cut off the poor devil's leg, while Despois was holding a large sponge. The blood was splashing down into the bucket. Colard was as pale as death. Catherine Lefèvre, standing beside him with a roll of lint over her arm, was striving to be firm, but two deep wrinkles that furrowed her cheeks by the side of her hooked nose showed how she was clenching her teeth. She was looking down on the ground without seeing anything.

"It's all over!" said the doctor, turning round.

And casting a glance at the new comers, he said:

"Ah! is that you, old Rochart?"

"Yes, that's me; but I don't want any one to meddle with me; I'd rather stay as I am."

The doctor, taking up a candle, looked at him, and made a wry face.

"It's time you were seen to, my poor old fellow; you've lost a deal of blood already, and if we wait much longer it will be too late."

"So much the better; I've suffered enough in my time."

"Just as you will: let's go to the next." He looked down a long row of mattresses at the bottom of the room; the two last were empty, though soaked in blood. Materne and Kasper laid the old wood-cutter on one, whilst Despois approached another of the wounded, saying:

"Nicolas, it's your turn now."

They then saw the tall form of Nicolas Cerf raise itself up, with a face deadly pale, and eyes glistening with fear.

"Give him a glass of brandy," said the doctor.

"No, I would like my pipe better."

"Where is your pipe?"

"In my waistcoat."

"All right; here it is. And the tobacco?"

"In my trousers' pocket."

"I've got it. Fill his pipe, Despois. He has courage, has this one: that's right! It does one good to see a man with a stout heart. We will have your arm off in double-quick time."

"Is there no way of saving it, Doctor Lorquin, for the sake of my poor children? It's their only living."

"No, the bone is crushed: it will never be any good

to you again. Light the pipe, Despois. Now then, Nicolas, smoke away."

The poor fellow began to smoke, without having a great desire for it.

"Are you all right?" asked the doctor.

"Yes," replied Nicolas, in a stifled voice.

"Good. Now then, Despois, attention!—the sponge!"

Then, with a large knife, he described a rapid circle through the flesh, while Nicolas ground his teeth with the agony.

The blood spurted out. Despois put a bandage tight round. The grinding of the saw was heard for a few seconds, and the arm fell heavily to the ground.

"That's what I call an operation well got through with," said Lorquin.

Nicolas was not smoking now: his pipe had fallen from his lips. David Schlosser de Walsch, who had held him, let him go. They bandaged the stump, and then Nicolas went without any assistance and laid himself down again on the mattress.

"There's one more despatched. Sponge the table, Despois, and let's get on to another," said the doctor, washing his hands in a large bowl.

Every time he said "Let's go to another," all the wounded were struck with fear on account of the groans they heard, and the sharp knives they caught sight of now and then; but what was to be done? Every room in the farm, the barn, the attics, all were filled with the wounded. There was nothing but the large room on the ground-floor left at liberty for the people belonging to the place; so the doctor was obliged to operate under the very eyes of those whose turn must come sooner or later.

All this had passed in a few moments. Materne and his sons had stood looking on, as people do look on at anything horrible to know what it is. Then they had seen in a corner on the left, just under the old Dutch clock, a heap of arms and legs jumbled together. Nicolas's arm had already been thrown on to the top, and the doctor was preparing to extract a ball from the shoulder of a mountaineer of the Harberg with red whiskers; large gashes in form of a cross had to be made in his back, and from his hairy, shuddering flesh the blood was streaming down to his boots.

It was strange to see the dog, Pluto, behind the doctor, surveying the operations with an attentive look, as if he understood it all; and from time to time he stretched his legs and bent his back with a yawn that reached from ear to ear.

Materne could not bear to see any more. "Let us be going," said he.

They had hardly entered the dark walk when they heard the doctor exclaim, "I've got the ball!" which must have caused great pleasure to the man from Harberg.

Once outside, and breathing the fresh clear air, Materne ejaculated: "And to think that the same might have happened to us!"

"Yes," replied Kasper; "to get a bullet through your head is no great matter; but it's another thing to be chopped about like that, and have to beg your bread for the rest of your days."

"Oh! I should do like old Rochart, for my part," said Frantz; "I should just die quietly, without any bother. When you've done your duty, what have you to fear? The good God is always the same!"

At this moment, the hum of voices was heard on their right.

"It is Marc Divès and Hullin," said Kasper, listening.

"Oh, yes! they have been, no doubt, making barricades behind the fir forest to protect the cannon," added Frantz.

They listened again; the footsteps drew nearer.

"You are greatly embarrassed with those three prisoners," Hullin was saying, in an abrupt tone. "Since you return to Falkenstein to-night to procure ammunition, what prevents your taking them with you?"

"But where shall I put them?"

"Where? Why, in the public prison of Abreschwiller; we cannot keep them here."

"All right; I understand, Jean-Claude; and if they attempt to escape by the way, I shall plant my toasting-iron between their shoulders."

"Of course, of course."

They had by this time reached the door, and Hullin, perceiving Materne, could not restrain a cry of delight.

"Ah! is it you, old fellow? I've been looking for you for the last hour. Where the deuce have you been to?"

"We've been carrying poor Rochart to the hospital, Jean-Claude."

"Ah! that's a bad job, isn't it?"

"Yes, very bad."

There was a moment's silence, and then, the worthy man's satisfaction regaining the upper hand, "Yes; it's not pleasant," he went on; "but what can you do? It's the chance of war. You're not hit, you fellows?"

"No; we are all three safe and sound."

"So much the better, so much the better. Those who are left may boast of having been lucky."

"Yes," exclaimed Marc Divès, laughing; "there was a moment when I thought Materne was going to sound a parley; but for those cannon-shots at the end, by my faith! things were taking a bad turn."

Materne coloured, and casting a side-look at the smuggler, "Possibly," he drily observed; "but had it not been for the cannon-shots at the beginning, we should have had no need of those at the end; old Rochart, and fifty more of our brave fellows, would have had their arms and legs still, which wouldn't have made our victory any the less pleasant."

"Bah!" interrupted Hullin, who foresaw the beginning of a dispute between two men whose dispositions were far from conciliatory. "Let's put an end to this; every one has done his duty, and that's the great thing." Then addressing Materne, "I have just despatched a messenger to Framont," said he, "to desire the Germans to fetch away their wounded. In an hour they will be here, no doubt; we must warn our look-outs to let them approach, but without arms, and with torches; if they come otherwise, let them be shot."

"I will see to it at once," replied the old huntsman.

"Hey! Materne, you will come to supper afterwards at the farm with your boys?"

"All right, Jean-Claude."

He departed.

Hullin then told Frantz and Kasper to have large camp fires lighted for the night; Marc, to give his horses a feed of corn, so that they might be ready to go, without loss of time, to fetch ammunition; and, as they withdrew to execute his orders, he entered the farm.

CHAPTER XVIII.

At the end of the dark walk was the court-yard of the farm, down to which you descended by five or six worn steps. On the left were the barn and the wine-press; on the right, the stables and pigeon-house, the gable roof of which stood out in strong and black relief against the dark and cloudy sky, while exactly opposite the door was the wash-house.

No sound from without reached this spot. Hullin, after so many scenes of tumult, was struck by this perfect and profound silence. He surveyed the trusses of straw suspended among the beams of the barn up to the very roof, the wheelbarrows, the carts—these latter standing in the shadow of the outhouses—with a feeling of calm and indefinable complacency. A cock was strutting about on the ground in the midst of his hens, who were sleeping all along the wall. A large cat flew by like lightning, and disappeared through a hole in the cellar. Hullin felt as if awakening from a dream. After a few moments of this silent contemplation, he was proceeding slowly towards the wash-house, the three windows of which were shining like stars in the midst of the darkness.

The farm-kitchen not sufficing to prepare the food of three or four hundred men, they had set up a temporary one in this part of the premises.

Master Jean-Claude heard the fresh voice of Louise issuing orders in a little resolute tone that quite took him by surprise.

"Come, come, Katel! let's be quick; it's near supper-time. We mustn't let our people be hungry. Since six o'clock this morning to have eaten nothing, and fighting hard all the while! We mustn't keep them waiting. Now then, Lesselé, come along, stir yourself—salt, pepper!"

Jean-Claude's heart leapt within him at the sound of this voice. He could not resist the pleasure of looking through the window for a moment before he went in. The kitchen was large, but rather low, and the walls were whitewashed. A large fire of beech-wood was blazing on the hearth, and encircling with its spiral columns of flame the black sides of an immense *marmite* (cauldron). The chimney-piece, very high and rather narrow, hardly sufficed to carry off the thick clouds of smoke that rose from the fire-place. The bright light served to clearly reveal the charming figure of Louise as she moved briskly about, coquettishly attired in a short petticoat, which afforded greater freedom to her limbs; her pretty face crimsoned in the ruddy glow; her bosom confined in a little bodice of red cloth, which displayed to perfection her sloping shoulders and graceful neck. There she was, in the very heat of action, going and coming, and tasting the dishes with her little bustling, housewifely air, trying the soup, approving and criticising. "A little more salt, a little of this, a little of that. Lesselé, won't you soon have finished plucking our great scraggy cock? At this rate, we shall never be ready."

It was really a charming sight to see her take the command thus. Hullin felt the tears come into his

eyes. The two daughters of the Anabaptist; one, long, dry, and pale, with her large flat feet thrust into round shoes, her red hair tucked up under a little coif of black taffeta, her blue cotton gown descending in long folds to her heels; the other, fat and plump, who waddled like a goose, lifting her feet slowly one after the other, and balancing herself with her arms akimbo; these two honest girls formed the strangest contrast to Louise. The fat Katel went to and fro quite out of breath, without saying a word, while Lessel , in an absent, dreamy way, did all by rule and compass.

The worthy Anabaptist himself, seated at the other end of the wash-house on a wooden chair, with his legs across, his head turned up, his cotton cap on the back of his head, and his hands in the pockets of his gaberdine, was watching everything with a look of astonishment, and saying from time to time, in a sententious voice: "Lessel , Katel, do just as she bids you, my children; it will be a good lesson for you; you've not yet seen the world; you must get on quicker."

"Yes, yes; we must bustle about," Louise would rejoin; "what would become of us if we were to take months and weeks to consider about putting a little garlic in the sauce? You, Lessel , you are the tallest; just reach me down that rope of onions from the ceiling."

And the tall girl instantly did as she was bid.

It was the proudest moment in Hullin's life. "How she orders the others about!" said he to himself; "he! he! he! she is a regular little hussar, a white-sergeant! I never suspected her of it."

And it was only at last, after five minutes' watching, that he made up his mind to go in.

"Holloa ! all right, children !"

Louise was at that moment peeping into a saucepan, spoon in hand ; she left everything, and ran to throw herself into his arms, exclaiming : " Papa Jean-Claude ! Papa Jean-Claude ! is it you ? You are not wounded ? you are not hurt ?"

Hullin, at the sound of that loving voice, turned pale, and was unable to reply.

It was only after a long silence, and still holding his dear child pressed close to his heart, that he was able at length to say, in a faltering voice, " No, Louise, no ; I am very well, and I feel very happy."

" Sit down, Jean-Claude," said the Anabaptist, who saw him trembling with emotion ; " see, here is my chair."

Hullin sat down, and Louise, seating herself on his knee, with her arm on his shoulder, began to cry.

" What is the matter, dear child ?" said the brave man, in a low voice, and embracing her affectionately. " Come, be calm ; a moment ago I saw you so courageous."

" Ah, yes ! I was pretending to be so ; but, do you know, I was in a great fright all the while ? I kept saying to myself, ' Why does he not come ?' "

She threw her arms round his neck ; then, in a natural outburst of joy, she took the good man by the hand, exclaiming : " Come, Papa Jean-Claude, let's have a dance !" and she waltzed him two or three times round the room.

Hullin smiled in spite of himself, and turning to the Anabaptist, who still preserved his serious air, " We are a little mad, Pelsly," said he ; " you mustn't let that surprise you."

"No, Master Hullin ; it's very natural. King David himself, after his great victory over the Philistines, danced before the ark."

Jean-Claude, astonished at resembling King David, made no reply. "And you, Louise," he replied, after a pause, "were you not afraid during the last battle?"

"Well, I was at first ; all that noise, and those cannon shots ; but afterwards, I thought of nothing but you and Mother Lefèvre."

Master Jean-Claude became silent. "I knew," he was thinking, "that that child had a brave heart. She thinks of everything, and fears nothing."

Louise then, taking him by the hand, led him in front of a regiment of saucepans all round the fire, and proudly pointed out to him all her cookery. "Here is the beef, here is the roast meat, here is the supper for General Jean-Claude, and here is the soup for our wounded. Ah ! we've had to make haste ! Lesselé and Katel can tell you. And here is our great batch of bread !" She went on pointing to a long row of loaves ranged on the table. "Mother Lefèvre and I baked it."

Hullin listened, quite wonderstruck.

"But that's not all," she added ; "come this way."

She took off the iron lid of the oven, at the other end of the wash-house, and the kitchen was immediately filled with an odour of delicious cake that rejoiced the heart. Master Jean-Claude was quite overcome.

At this moment Dame Lefèvre entered the room. "Come," said she ; "we must lay the table ; everybody is ready and waiting. Come, Katel, go and lay the cloth."

The fat girl ran quickly out, and then, all together

crossing the dark court-yard, one behind the other, proceeded towards the keeping-room of the farm. There they found Doctor Lorquin, Despois, Marc Divès, Materne, and his two sons, all sharp-set, and provided with good stout appetites, impatiently awaiting the arrival of the soup.

"And our wounded, Doctor?" exclaimed Hullin, entering.

"All is finished, Master Jean-Claude; you've given us some tough jobs to do; but the weather is favourable; there is no fear of putrid fevers, and all is going as well as can be."

Katel, Lesselé, and Louise shortly after entered, carrying an enormous smoking soup-tureen, and two magnificent joints of roast beef, which they placed upon the table. They took their places without any ceremony, old Materne to the right of Jean-Claude, Catherine Lefèvre on his left, and from that time the clattering of knives and forks, and the opening of bottles, took the place of conversation until half-past eight in the evening. Out of doors, the reflection of bright fires on the window-panes announced that the other volunteers were also enjoying themselves, and doing justice to Louise's cookery, which still further contributed to the satisfaction of the guests within.

At nine o'clock, Marc Divès was on his way to Falkenstein with the prisoners. By ten o'clock every one was asleep at the farm, and on the mountain around the camp fires.

Nothing broke the silence, save, from time to time, the distant challenge of the sentinels on duty, going their rounds.

Thus ended this day, on which the mountaineers proved that they had not degenerated from the ancient race.

Other events, not less grave, were soon to succeed those which had just taken place; for in this world, one obstacle is no sooner overcome, than others present themselves. Human life resembles a troubled sea; one wave follows another from the old world to the new, and nothing can stop this eternal movement.



CHAPTER XIX.

THROUGHOUT the whole of the battle and until night-fall, the folks of Grandfontaine had seen the fool Yégof standing on the summit of the Little Donon, his crown on his head, his sceptre uplifted, transmitting, like a Merovingian king, orders to his imaginary armies.

What passed through the mind of this unhappy being when he saw the utter rout of the Germans, no one knows. At the last cannon-shot he had disappeared. Whither had he fled?

This is what is related on this subject by the inhabitants of Tiefenbach.

At that time, there lived in the Bocksberg two singular creatures, two sisters, one called Little Kate-line and the other Big Berbel. These two tattered beings had fixed their abode in the *Cavern of Luitprandt*, so called, say the old chronicles, because the King of the Germans, before descending into Alsace, caused to be interred under that immense vault of red freestone the barbarian chiefs who fell in the battle of Blutfeld. The warm spring that rises always in the middle of the cavern protected the two sisters against the rigorous colds of winter, and the woodcutter, Daniel Horn, of Tiefenbach, had had the charity to close up the principal entrance of the rock with heaps of broom and brushwood. By the side of the warm spring was

another, cold as ice, and clear as crystal. Little Kateline, who drank at this spring, was not four feet high; she was stout and squat, and her vacant look, round eyes, and an enormous wen, gave to her the singular expression of a fat turkey in a meditative mood. Every Sunday she was in the habit of lugging to the village of Tiefenbach a wicker basket, which the good people filled with cold potatoes, crusts of bread, and sometimes—on festivals—with cakes and other leavings of their merry-makings. Then the poor creature, quite out of breath, returned to her rocky home, chuckling, laughing, gibbering, and crying all at once. Big Berbel was very careful not to drink at the cold spring; she was lean, one-eyed, and as skinny as a bat; she had a flat nose, large ears, a sparkling eye, and lived on what her sister managed to pick up; but in July, when the very hot weather had set in, she used to shake from the mountain-side a dry thistle over the harvest-fields of those who had not regularly filled Kateline's basket, which brought down upon them fearful storms, hail, rats, and field-mice in abundance.

For which reason they dreaded the spells of Berbel like the plague; she was known everywhere by the name of *Wetterhexe*,* whilst little Kateline passed everywhere for being the good genius of Tiefenbach and its neighbourhood. In this way Berbel lived at her ease, by folding her arms, and the other by clucking and pecking for it wherever it was to be found.

Unfortunately for the two sisters, Yégof had established, for a number of years past, his winter residence in Luitprandt's Caye. It was from thence that he took his departure in the spring, to visit his innumerable

* Storm Witch.

castles, and pass in review his fiefs as far as Geierstein, in the Hundsrück. Every year, therefore, towards the end of November, after the first snows, he came with his raven, which always produced a succession of eagle-like croaks from Wetterhexe.

"What is the matter with you," he would say, quietly installing himself in the best place; "are you not living on my domains? I think it is very good of me to keep two useless *valkiries* in the Valhalla of my fathers."

Then Berbel would become furious, and overwhelm him with taunts and abuse, while Kateline would sit clucking with an angry look; but he, without taking any notice of them, lit his pipe—made of old boxwood—and began to relate his distant peregrinations to the souls of the German warriors interred in the cavern sixteen centuries ago, calling them by their names, and speaking to them like living beings. I leave you to imagine whether Berbel and Kateline saw the fool arrive with pleasure; to them it was a positive calamity. Now, this year, Yégof not having come, the two sisters thought he was dead, and were rejoicing in the idea of never seeing him any more. During the last few days, however, Wetterhexe had remarked the agitation that prevailed in the neighbouring gorges; people departing in large bodies, gun on shoulder, from the regions of the Falkenstein and the Donon. Evidently something out of the common was taking place. The witch, remembering that the year before Yégof had related to the souls of the warriors that his innumerable followers were shortly going to invade the country, felt a sort of vague uneasiness. She would have given anything to know the reason of this unusual disturbance, but no one came up to the rock where they dwelt, and Kateline having

gone her usual journey the Sunday before, would not have stirred for an empire.

In this state of things, Wetterhexe wandered over the mountain-side, getting more and more anxious and distraught.

During the whole of this particular Saturday, things went even further. From nine o'clock in the morning, loud and heavy explosions rolled like the sound of a tempest amid the thousand echoes of the mountain; and in the distance, towards the Donon, swift lightnings flashed across the sky between the tall tops of the mountains; then, towards night, noises still more deep and formidable resounded through the silent gorges. At each explosion, the summits of the Hengst, the Gantzlée, the Giromani, the Grosmann, were heard to echo back their answer through the very depths of the abyss.

"What is that?" asked Berbel, of herself. "Is it the end of the world?"

Then, re-entering the cavern, and seeing Kateline squatting in her corner, nibbling a potato, she shook her roughly, exclaiming, in a hissing voice: "Idiot! do you, then, hear nothing? You are not afraid of anything—not you! You eat, you drink, you cluck! Oh! you monster!"

She snatched her potato furiously away, and sat down, quite trembling with passion, by the warm spring which was sending up its grey clouds to the vaulted roof of the cavern.

Half an hour after, it having grown dark, and the cold excessive, she lit a fire of brushwood, which threw a pale and flickering light over the blocks of red stone, to the very end of the cavern where Kateline was now sleeping, with her feet in the straw, and her knees up to

her chin. Outside every sound had ceased. Wetter-hexe pushed aside the bushes at the entrance, to cast a look upon the mountain-side; then she returned and squatted again beside the fire, her large mouth closely compressed, her flabby eyelids shut, forming large circular wrinkles round her cheeks, she drew over her knees an old woollen coverlet, and seemed to be taking a doze. Not a sound was to be heard, save at long intervals, the faint murmur of the condensed vapour falling back from the vault to the spring.

This death-like silence lasted for about two hours; midnight was approaching, when, all at once, a distant sound of footsteps, mingled with discordant clamours, was heard on the mountain-side. Berbel listened; she recognised the sound of the human voice. Then rising, all of a tremble, and armed with her large thistle, she glided to the entrance of the rock, pushed the bushes aside, and saw, at the distance of fifty paces, the fool Yégof, advancing in the bright moonlight. Flourishing his sceptre in the air, he was calling upon his followers, and fighting and struggling as if he were in the thick of a battle. This fearful conflict with invisible beings struck Berbel with superstitious terror; she felt her hair stand on end, and would have fled and hid herself, but, at the same instant, a confused murmur caused her to turn suddenly round, and judge of her alarm when she saw the hot spring boiling more than usual, and clouds of steam rise from it, then detach themselves and move in floating masses towards the door.

And whilst, like phantoms, these thick clouds were slowly advancing, Yégof appeared, exclaiming, in a sharp voice: "At last you are here. You have heard me!"

Then, with a rapid gesture, he put aside every impediment: a rush of frosty air penetrated the cavern, and the vapours dispersed themselves over the spacious canopy of heaven, wreathing and twisting themselves over the rock as if the dead of that day, and those of centuries past, had renewed, in other spheres, the eternal combat,

Yégof, his features livid and contracted beneath the moon's pale rays, his sceptre outstretched, his long beard descending to his breast, and his eyes flashing, saluted each imaginary phantom with a gesture, and called it by its name, saying: "Hail, Bled! hail, Roug! and all of you, my brave companions, hail! The hour you have waited for for centuries is near; the eagles are sharpening their beaks, the earth thirsts for blood; remember the Blutfeld!"

Then Yégof abruptly entered the cavern, and crouched down near the spring, with his huge head between his hands, and his elbows on his knees, watching the bubbling of the water, with a wild and haggard eye.

Kateline had just awoke, and her clucking sounded like sobs; Wetterhexe, more dead than alive, was watching the fool from the darkest corner of the cavern.

"They have all risen from the earth!" suddenly exclaimed Yégof—"all, all! there are none left; they are gone to revive the courage of my young men, and inspire them with contempt for death!" and, raising his pale face, impressed with the expression of bitter grief, "They fought valiantly—yes, yes, they did their duty well—but the hour was not yet come. And now the ravens are fighting over their flesh!" Then, in an accent of terrible rage, tearing off his crown, and handfuls of his hair with both hands: "Oh! race accursed!"

ne shouted, "must you for ever cross our path? But for you, we should already have conquered Europe; the red men would be masters of the universe! And I have humbled myself before the leader of that race of dogs. I have asked of him his daughter, in lieu of taking her and carrying her off, as the wolf does with the sheep. Ah! Huldrix! Huldrix!" Then, interrupting himself: "Listen, listen, *valkirie*," said he, in a low voice; and he raised his finger solemnly. Wetterhexe listened. A very high night-wind had just risen, shaking the old forest trees, with their frost-covered branches. How many times had the sorceress heard the north ~~wind~~ howl through the long winter nights without even taking heed of it? But now, how terror-stricken she was! And as she stood there, trembling from head to foot, a harsh cry was heard without, and almost immediately the raven, Hans, dashed wildly into the cavern, and began to describe wide circles overhead, flapping his wings in a frightened manner, and uttering dismal croakings.

Yégof turned as pale as a corpse.

"Vòd, Vòd!" he exclaimed, in heartrending tones, "what has thy son Luitprandt done to thee?"

And for a few seconds he remained as if terror-stricken; but suddenly seized with a wild enthusiasm, and brandishing his sceptre, he rushed out of the cavern.

He went straight forward, with outstretched neck and striding step, like a wild beast marching to his prey. Hans preceded him, fluttering from place to place.

CHAPTER XX.

THE Germans had quitted Grandfontaine, Framont, and even Schirmeck. At a distance, very far off, on the plains of Alsace, dark points might be remarked indicating their battalions in retreat. Hullin awoke early, and made the round of the camp. He stood for a few moments contemplating the scene that lay extended before him, the cannon pointed towards the gorge, the volunteers stretched around the fire, the armed sentinels; then, satisfied with his inspection, he returned to the farm where Louise and Catherine were still sleeping.

The greyish light of dawn was stealing through the chamber. A few wounded in the next apartment were beginning to be attacked by fever; they might be heard calling on their wives and mothers. A little later, the hum of voices and the footsteps of people coming to and fro broke the still silence of the night. Catherine and Louise awoke; and the first sight that met their eyes was Jean-Claude sitting in a corner of the window-seat, gazing affectionately upon them; and, ashamed of their apparent laziness, they rose at once, to go and embrace him.

"Well?" said Catherine, inquiringly.

"Well, they are gone; we are left masters of the route, as I foresaw."

This assurance did not appear to tranquillise the old

farm-mistress ; she had to look out of window, and see with her own eyes the Germans in full retreat as far as Alsace. And even then all the remainder of the day her stern countenance still preserved the expression of an indefinable anxiety.

Between eight and nine o'clock, the pastor Saumaize arrived from the village of Charmes. Some mountaineers then came down to the foot of the mountain to carry away the dead ; they then dug, to the right of the farm, a long ditch, where volunteers and *kaiserlicks*, whether clad in uniform or coats, hats or shakos, were quietly ranged side by side.

The pastor Saumaize, a tall old man, with white hair, read the ancient form of prayer for the dead in that rapid and mysterious tone which penetrates to the very bottom of the soul, and seems to invoke bygone generations to attest to the living the horrors of the tomb.

All day long carriages and *schlittes** kept arriving to remove the wounded, who were imploring to be allowed to see their native village once more. Doctor Lorquin, fearing to increase their irritation, was forced to consent to it. About four o'clock Catherine and Hullin found themselves alone in the large house-room of the farm. Louise had gone to prepare the supper. Out of doors large flakes of snow continued to fall from the skies, and lay thick upon the window-ledges, and from moment to moment a sleigh was to be seen setting out silently with its sick burden lying buried in the straw ; sometimes a man, sometimes a woman, leading the horse by the bridle. Catherine, seated by the table, was folding bandages with an absent air.

* A sort of sledge peculiar to the district of the Vosges.

"Why, what's the matter with you, Catherine?" inquired Hullin. "Since this morning I have noticed how low-spirited you seem. And yet everything is prospering with us."

The old farm-mistress, then slowly pushing back the linen from her, replied:

"It is true, Jean-Claude; I am troubled."

"Troubled! and what about? The enemy is in full retreat. Only just now, Frantz Materne, whom I had sent to reconnoitre, and all the scouts from Piorette, from Jérôme, and from Labarbe, have come to tell me that the Germans are returning to Mutzig. Old Materne and Kasper, after helping to remove the dead, were informed at Grandfontaine that there was nothing to be seen of them on the side of Saint Blaize-la-Roche. All this proves that our Spanish dragoons gave the enemy a warm reception on the road to Senones, and that they were in fear of having their retreat cut off by Schirmeck. I cannot see, therefore, Catherine, what it is you are tormenting yourself about."

And as Hullin regarded her with a questioning look, "You will laugh at me again," said she: "I have had a dream."

"A dream?"

"Yes, the same that I had at the farm of Bois-des-Chênes."

Then, growing excited, she went on in almost an angry tone:

"You may say what you like, Jean-Claude; but a great danger threatens us. Yes, yes, all this, in your opinion, has not a shadow of common sense. Moreover, this was not a dream; it was all like an old story coming back to your mind; something that you see



" PASTOR SAUMAIZE READ THE PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD."

again in your sleep, and that you recognise again. Listen. We were, as to-day, after a great victory, somewhere, I don't know where, in a sort of great wooden barrack, with heavy rafters across, and palings round it. We were not in fear of anything; all the faces that I saw, I knew; you were there, and Marc Divès, and many others, old people dead long ago; my father, and old Hugh Rochart, of the Harberg, uncle of the one who has just died, all wearing gaberdines of thick grey cloth, long beards, and bare-necked. We had just won a similar victory, and we were drinking out of a large red earthen pot, when suddenly a cry was raised: "The enemy is returning!" and Yégof, on horseback, with his long beard, his pointed crown, a hatchet in his hand, his eyes glaring like those of a wolf, appeared before me in the darkness of the night. I rush upon him with a stake—he awaits me; and from that moment I see nothing more; only I feel a terrible pain in my neck, a gust of cold wind passes over my face, and it seems to me as if my head were dangling at the end of a cord. It was that miscreant Yégof who had hung my head at his saddle, and was galloping away!" continued the old farm-mistress, in such a tone of conviction that it made Hulin shudder.

There was a few moments' silence; then Jean-Claude, recovering from his stupefied inaction, replied:

"It was a dream. I myself have such dreams sometimes. Yesterday you were disturbed, agitated—all that noise, those shouts."

"No," she retorted, in a firm tone, resuming her occupation—"no, it is not that. And to tell you the truth, during the whole of the battle, and even at the very moment when the cannon was roaring against us,

I was not one bit afraid; I was certain beforehand that we could not be beaten: I had already seen that, but now I am afraid!"

"But the Germans have evacuated Schirmeek; all the line of the Vosges is defended; we have more people than we require; they keep on coming every minute."

"No matter!"

Hullin shrugged his shoulders.

"Come, come, you are excited, Catherine; try to be calm, and think of pleasanter things. As for all these dreams, look you, I value them just as much as I do the Grand Turk, with his pipe and his blue stockings. The great thing is to be well on our guard, to have plenty of ammunition, men and cannon; these are worth much more than the very brightest of dreams."

"You are laughing at me, Jean-Claude."

"No; but to hear a woman of good sense and great courage speak like you, reminds one, in spite of oneself, of Yégof, who boasts of having lived sixteen hundred years ago."

"Who knows," said the old woman, in a persistent tone, "whether he recollects what others have forgotten?"

Hullin was about to relate to her his conversation of the evening before at the camp with the fool, thinking thus to upset from top to bottom all her dismal visions; but seeing that she held the same opinion as Yégof on the question of the sixteen hundred years, the brave fellow said nothing more, and resumed his silent walk, with head hung down and careworn brow. "She is mad," he was thinking to himself; "one more little shock, and it will be all over with her."

Catherine, after a moment, in which she seemed to be lost in thought, was just about to say something, when Louise came skimming in like a swallow, exclaiming, in her sweetest voice:—

“Mother Lefèvre, Mother Lefèvre, here is a letter from Gaspard!”

Then the old farm-mistress, whose hooked nose seemed bent down till it almost met her lips, so indignant was she to see Hullin turn her dream into ridicule, raised her head, and the deep wrinkles in her cheeks relaxed. She took the letter, looked at the red seal, and said to the young girl:

“Kiss me, Louise; it is a good letter.”

And Louise immediately bestowed on her a warm embrace.

Hullin had joined them, quite delighted at this incident, and Brainstein, the postman, with his thick shoes an inch deep in snow, stooping shoulders, and his two hands leaning on his stick, stationed himself at the door with a tired look.

The old woman put on her spectacles, opened the letter in a sort of meditative way under the impatient eyes of Jean-Claude and Louise, and read aloud:

“This, my good mother, comes to tell you that all is as well as can be, and that I arrived on Tuesday evening at Phalsbourg, just as they were closing the gates. The Cossacks were already on the side of Saverne; we had to keep up a constant fire all night against their vanguard. The next day, an envoy came to summon us to surrender the place. The governor, Meunier, made answer that he might go and hang himself elsewhere, and three days after great showers of bombs and howitzer-shells began to rain upon the town. The Russians

have three batteries, one on the side of Mittelbronn, the other at the barracks above, and the third behind the tile-kiln of Pernette ; but the red-hot shot did us the most harm ; they burn the houses from bottom to top, and when some part is set fire to, then come the howitzer-shells in a body and hinder people from putting it out. The women and children do not leave the block houses ; the inhabitants remain with us upon the ramparts ; they are brave fellows ; there are among them some old warriors of Sambre and Meuse, of Italy and Egypt, who have not forgotten their old skill. It made me sorry to see the old greybeards hard at work again with the guns. I warrant you, no bullet misses its mark with them. But, for all that, when you've made the world tremble, it's rather hard to be forced, in your last days, to defend your barrack and your last morsel of bread."

"Yes, it is hard," put in Dame Catherine, wiping her eyes ; "only to think of it makes one sorrowful." Then she continued :—

"The day before yesterday the governor decided to make an attack upon the Russian battery at the back of the tile-kiln. You know that the Russians are in the habit of breaking the ice of the tank to bathe in companies of twenty or thirty, and that they then go to dry themselves in the furnace of the brick-kiln. Good. About four o'clock, as day was departing, we went out by the postern of the arsenal, and passed through the Allée des Vaches, gun on shoulder, at a rapid trot. A few minutes after, we opened a running fire on the Cossacks who were bathing in the tank. All the rest then came out of the tile-kiln. They had only just time to catch up their cartridge-pouches, shoulder their

guns, and place themselves in rank, all naked, like so many savages as they were, in the snow. But, for all that, the beggars were ten times more numerous than we, and they were just commencing a movement in the direction of the little chapel of St. Jean, in order to surround us, when the cannon from the arsenal began to pour such a hail of shot in their direction as I never saw the like of before. The grape shot carried away whole files right out of sight. At the end of a quarter of an hour, all in a body began a retreat upon Quatre-Vents, without stopping to pick up their pantaloons, the officers at the head of them, and showers of bullets bringing up the rear. Papa Jean-Claude would have laughed fit to crack his sides at the sight. At length, at nightfall we returned to the town, after having stormed the battery, and thrown two eight-pound shot into the brick-kiln. This is our first expedition. To-day, I am writing to you from the barracks of Bois-des-Chênes, where we are quartered to provision the place. All this may last for months. I have already told you that the Allies are returning by the valley of Dosenheim as far as Weschem, and that they are gaining by thousands the road to Paris. Ah ! if it were only God's will that the Emperor should have the upper hand in Lorraine or in Champagne, not a single one of them would escape. However, he who lives longest sees the most. They are sounding the recall from Phalsbourg ; we have not fared badly in the way of oxen, cows, and goats in the neighbourhood. There will be a little fighting to get them all in safe and sound. Farewell for the present, my good mother, my dear Louise, Papa Jean-Claude ; my affectionate and loving remembrances to you all."

As she finished reading, Catherine Lefèvre was quite overcome with emotion.

“What a brave boy!” said she; “he knows nothing but his duty. In short, you hear, Louise, he sends you his affectionate and loving remembrances.”

Louise then throwing herself into her arms, they gave each other a hearty embrace, and Dame Catherine, in spite of the firmness of her character, could not restrain two big tears which slowly coursed each other down her wrinkled cheeks; then recovering herself:

“Come, come,” said she, “all is going well. Here, Brainstein, you go and eat a piece of beef and drink a glass of wine. Here is a crown-piece for your trouble; I should like to have to give you a similar sum every week for just such another letter.”

The postman, delighted with this gratuity, followed the old woman; Louise walked behind, and Jean-Claude came after, impatient to question Brainstein on all that he had learnt by the way touching present events, but he gained nothing new from him, except that the Allies were investing Bitche and Lutzelstein, and that they had lost several hundred men in endeavouring to force the defile of the Graufthâl.



CHAPTER XXI.

ABOUT ten o'clock in the evening, Catherine Lefèvre and Louise, having wished Hullin good-night, went up into the room overhead. There were two large feather beds; and the tall bedsteads, nearly as high as the ceiling, with their long curtains, striped blue and red, had an extremely warm and comfortable appearance.

"Come," exclaimed the old farm-mistress, getting upon her chair, "come, sleep well, my child; for my part, I am quite worn out; I can keep up no longer."

She drew the bed-clothes over her, and in less than five minutes after she was sound asleep.

Louise, being also exhausted, was not long in following her example.

Now this had lasted about a couple of hours, when the old woman was awakened with a start by a fearful tumult. Everything was in an uproar.

"To arms!" was the cry—"to arms! Hi! this way, a thousand thunders! they are upon us!"

Five or six shots followed, illuminating the dark window-panes.

"To arms! to arms!"

The shots were heard again. People were hurrying to and fro. Then Hullin's voice was heard—sharp, penetrating, issuing orders. Then to the left of the

farm, a good distance off, came a sound like a heavy prolonged crackling in the gorges of the Grosmann.

"Louise, Louise!" exclaimed Catherine, "did you hear that noise?"

"Yes. Oh! heavens! how terrible!"

Catherine jumped out of bed.

"Get up, my child," said she; "let us dress ourselves."

The shots were by this time redoubled, and kept passing like flashes of lightning across the window-panes.

"Attention!" shouted Materne.

With these sounds were mingled the neighing of a horse outside, and the trampling of a multitude of people in the alley, in the court-yard, and in front of the farm; the house seemed shaken to its very foundations,

All at once the firing was replied to from the windows of the room on the ground floor. The two women dressed themselves in haste. At this moment the staircase creaked under a heavy footstep; the door opened, and Hullin appeared with a lantern, pale, his hair in disorder, and every sign of agitation visible in his face.

"Make haste!" he exclaimed; "we have not a moment to lose."

"Why, what is happening?" asked Catherine anxiously.

The firing was evidently coming nearer and nearer.

"What?" exclaimed Jean-Claude, almost beside himself, and wildly tossing up his arms; "do you think I have time to explain things to you?"

The farm-mistress saw that there was nothing to do but obey orders. She took her hood, and descended

the staircase with Louise. By the flickering light of the shots, Catherine saw Materne, bare-necked, and his son, Kasper, firing from the entrance of the valley on to the barricades, while ten others behind them kept loading and handing the guns to them, so that they had nothing to do but to take aim and fire. All this motley group, busily engaged in loading, shouldering, and firing, gave a terrible aspect to the scene. Three or four dead bodies, propped up against the old decayed wall, added to the horror of the combat; the smoke was beginning to make its way rapidly into the dwelling.

When they had reached the foot of the staircase, Hullin exclaimed: "Here they are, thanks be to God!" And all the brave fellows about there, looking up and seeing them, called out, "Courage! Mother Lefèvre!"

Then the poor old dame, her frame quite shattered by so many emotions, began to cry. She leaned on the shoulder of Jean-Claude; but the latter passed his strong arm round her, and carried her off like a feather, running all along the wall to the right. Louise followed, crying and sobbing.

Out of doors nothing was to be heard but the whizzing of bullets through the air, heavy thuds against the wall; bricks and mortar were giving way, and tiles flying about in all directions, and exactly opposite, in the vicinity of the barricades, three hundred paces off, were to be seen the white uniforms, in line, lit up by their own fire in the thick darkness of night, and then to their left, on the other side of the ravine of the Minières, the mountaineers, who were taking them in the flank.

Hullin disappeared at the turning by the farm ; there all was plunged in darkness. It was as much as you could do to catch a glimpse of Doctor Lorquin on horseback in front of a sleigh, a long cavalry sword in his hand, two holster-pistols in his belt, and Frantz Materne, with a dozen of men, with grounded arms, trembling with rage. Hullin placed Catherine in the sledge, on a truss of straw, and then Louise beside her.

"There you are!" exclaimed the doctor, "and it's a very lucky thing!"

And Frantz Materne added : "If it had not been for you, Dame Lefèvre, you may easily believe that not one of us would quit this spot to-night ; but when you are in the case, there is nothing to say."

"No," cried the others ; "there is nothing to say."

At the same moment, a great tall, long-backed fellow, with legs as long as a heron's, came from behind the wall, running at full speed, and shouting : "The enemy ! Fly ! save yourselves !"

Hullin turned as pale as death.

"It is the great grinder of the Harberg," said he, gnashing his teeth.

Frantz said not a word ; he shouldered his carbine, took aim, and fired.

Louise saw the grinder, thirty paces off in the shadow, stretch out his two long arms, and fall, face downwards, to the ground.

Frantz reloaded his gun, smiling with a strange expression.

Hullin said : "Comrades, here is our mother ; she who has given us powder, and supplied us with food

for the defence of our country, and here is my child save them!"

They all replied, with one voice: "We will save them, or perish with them."

"And do not forget to tell Divès that he is to remain at the Falkenstein till further orders."

"All right, Master Jean-Claude."

"Then forward, doctor, forward!" cried the brave man.

"And you, Hullin?" said Catherine.

"For me, my place is here; we shall have to defend our position to the death!"

"Papa Jean-Claude!" cried Louise, stretching out her arms to him.

But he had already turned the corner; the doctor struck his horse, the sleigh sped over the snow, and behind followed Frantz Materne and his men, carbine on shoulder, while the firing still continued all round the farm. This is what Catherine Lefèvre and Louise beheld in the space of a few minutes. Something strange and terrible had doubtless happened during the night. The old farm-mistress, recollecting her dream, grew silent and absorbed. Louise dried her tears, and threw a long look on the hill-side she was leaving, and which was all alight, as if on fire. The horse, urged by the doctor, went at full speed; the mountaineers who formed the escort could hardly keep up with him. For a long time still the tumult, the sounds of the combat, the explosions, the hissing of bullets whistling through the trees, continued to be heard; but all this, by degrees, grew less and less, and in a short time, at the descent of the path, all had disappeared as in a dream.

The sledge had just reached the other acclivity of the mountain, and was speeding like an arrow through the darkness of the night. The gallop of the horse, the hurried breathing of the escort, the occasional cry of the doctor, "Up, Bruno! come up, then!" alone disturbed the silence.

A strong gust of cold air coming up from the valleys of the Sarre, brought from a distance, like a sigh, the ceaseless sounds of the torrents and the woods. The moon, just emerging from behind the cloud, shed her pale light over the gloomy forests of the Blanru with their tall fir-trees loaded with snow.

Ten minutes after, the sledge reached the corner of these woods, and Doctor Lorquin, turning round on his saddle, called out :

"Now, Frantz, what shall we do? This is the path which leads towards the hills of St. Quirin, and this other leads down to the Blanru; which shall we take?"

Frantz and his escort had come up with them. As they found themselves then on the eastern declivity of the Donon, they began to see again, on the other side, high in air, the firing of the Germans who came by the Grosmann.

They saw nothing but the flashes, and a few instants after the reports awoke the echoes of the abyss.

"The path by the hills of St. Quirin," said Frantz, "is the shortest way to the farm of Bois-des-Chênes; we shall gain at least three-quarters of an hour."

"Yes," cried the doctor; "but we risk being stopped by the *kaiserlicks*, who now hold the pass of the Sarre. See, they are already masters of the heights; they have, no doubt, sent detachments on to Sarre-Rouge to secure the passage of the Donon."

"Let us take the path by the Blanru," said Frantz; "it is longer, but it is safer."

The sleigh descended the path, to the left through the woods. The volunteers marched one behind the other, gun in hand, on the rising ground, while the doctor on horseback in the road beneath made his way through the untrodden snow that lay thick upon the ground. Above hung the branches of the dark fir-trees overshadowing the gloomy pathway, while all around the moon was shining brightly. As they proceeded thus for about a quarter of an hour, in silence, Catherine, after having held her tongue for a long while, not being able to contain herself any longer, exclaimed:

"Doctor Lorquin, now that you have got us into the pass of the Blanru, and can do what you like with us, perhaps you will be good enough to explain why we have been taken away by force? Jean-Claude came and caught me up in his arms, and tossed me on to this truss of straw, and here I am!"

"Houp, Bruno!" said the doctor.

Then he gravely replied:—"To-night, Dame Catherine, the worst of misfortunes has befallen us. You must not be angry with Jean-Claude, for through the fault of another, we lose the fruit of all our sacrifices."

"By whose fault?"

"Of that unlucky Labarbe, who has not held the pass of the Blutfeld. He has since died doing his duty; but that does not repair the disaster, and if Piorette does not come in time to the support of Hullin, all is lost! We must yield our posts, and beat a retreat."

“What! Blutfeld is taken?”

“Yes, Dame Catherine; who the deuce would have ever thought that the Germans could approach that way? A defile almost impracticable for foot passengers, hemmed in as it is between perpendicular rocks, where the shepherds themselves can hardly descend with their flocks of goats. Well, they passed through there, two by two; surprised Roche-Creuse; they killed Labarbe, and then fell upon Jérôme, who defended himself like a lion until nine o'clock in the evening; but, at the last, he was obliged to fly into the fir forest, and leave the passage free to the *kaiserlicks*. That is the whole of the story. It is fearful. There must have been in the country some man cowardly enough, vile enough, to guide the enemy to our rear, and deliver us up, bound hand and foot. Oh! the wretch!” exclaimed Lorquin, his voice quivering with rage. “I am not naturally cruel; but if he should fall into my clutches, I would tear him to pieces! Houp, Bruno! come up!”

The volunteers still continued their way along the rising ground, silently, like shadows.

The sleigh again set off at full gallop, then, after a while, relaxed its speed; the horse was panting for breath.

The old farm-mistress continued silent, to arrange these fresh ideas in her head.

“I begin to understand,” said she, after a few moments; “we have been attacked to-night in front and on the side.”

“Exactly so, Catherine; fortunately, ten minutes before the attack, one of Marc Divès’ men—a smuggler,

Zimmer, the ex-dragon—came in breathless haste to put us on our guard. But for that, we should have been lost. He came up with our vanguard, after having run the gauntlet of a whole regiment of Cossacks on the side of the Grosmann. The poor devil had received a terrible sword-thrust; his bowels were hanging over his saddle; were they not, Frantz?"

"Yes," gloomily replied the young huntsman.

"And what did he say?" asked the old farm-mistress.

"He had only time to cry, 'To arms! we are surprised. Jérôme has sent me. Labarbe is dead. The Germans have forced the Blutfeld.'"

"He was a brave man," said Catherine.

"Yes, he was a brave man!" replied Frantz, despondingly.

Then all became silent again, and for a long time the sleigh continued to wend its way along the winding valley.

At times it was obliged to stop, the snow was so deep; three or four mountaineers then got down to lead the horse by the bridle, and they thus continued on their way.

"But, for all that," rejoined Catherine, suddenly rousing herself from her reverie, "Hullin might just as well have told me."

"But if he had told you of those two attacks," interrupted the doctor, "you would have wanted to stay behind."

"And who could have prevented my doing what I wish? If I pleased now to alight at this moment from the sleigh and go back, should I not be free to do so

I have forgiven Jean-Claude, and I am sorry that I did so."

"Oh! Mother Lefèvre, if he should happen to be killed while you were saying that?" murmured Louise.

"The child is right," thought Catherine; and then quickly added: "I say that I am sorry for it; but he is such a brave and worthy man that you cannot be angry with him. I forgive him with all my heart; in his place I should have acted like him."

Two or three hundred paces further on, they entered the defile of the Roches. The snow had ceased to fall; the moon was shining brightly between two large black and white clouds. The narrow gorge, shut in by steep rocks, lay stretched in the distance, and on the mountain sides, tall fir-trees lifted their lofty tops to the skies. Nothing disturbed the deep silence of the woods; you might have thought yourself far away from any human agitation. The silence was so profound that not only was every one of the horse's steps distinctly heard on the snow, but at times even his heavy breathing. Frantz Materne would sometimes stop, and cast a hasty, anxious glance around, then step out quickly again to overtake the others.

And valleys succeeded to valleys. The sleigh ascended, descended, turned to the right, then to the left, while the mountaineers, with the glitter of their steel bayonets just visible in the greyish dawn, as perseveringly followed it.

They had just reached thus, about four o'clock in the morning, the meadow of the Brimbelles, where there may be seen in our own day a large oak just at the turn of the valley. On the other side, on the

left, in the midst of trees and shrubs all white with snow, behind its little stone wall, and the palings of its little garden, the old house of the keeper Cuny was just beginning to be visible, with its three beehives safely fixed on a plank, its old knotty vine creeping to the very top of its shelving roof, and its little branch of fir suspended outside in form of a sign, for Cuny carried on also the trade of publican in this solitary place.



CHAPTER XXII.

AT the spot which the sleigh and the convoy had reached, the road winds round at the higher portion of the level ground, which lies four or five feet below, and as a thick cloud veiled the moon, the doctor, afraid of upsetting his equipage, stopped under the oak.

"We have only about an hour's journey more, Dame Lefèvre," said he, "so be of good heart; we are out of danger now."

"Yes," said Frantz; "we have got the worst part over, and now we can let the horse take a little breath."

All the band gathered round the sleigh, and the doctor alighted. Some struck a match to light their pipes, but no one said anything, for they were all thinking of the Donon. What was passing there? Would Jean-Claude succeed in holding his position until the arrival of Piorette? So many painful things, so many mournful reflections passed through the minds of these brave fellows, that no one had the least desire to speak.

When they had been standing for about five minutes beneath the old oak, just as the cloud was slowly retiring, and the pale moonlight streamed through the gorge, all at once, at two hundred paces opposite them, a dark figure on horseback appeared in the footpath among the fir-trees. The moon's rays, falling full on

this tall dark figure, revealed distinctly to them a Cossack, with his sheepskin cap, and his long lance under his arm, the point behind. He was coming along at a gentle trot. Frantz had already taken aim, when behind the first appeared another lance, then another Cossack, then another, and among the dark shadows of the trees, and under the pale canopy of heaven, the trampling of horses and glittering of lances announced the approach of the Cossacks in single file, who were coming straight towards the sledge, but leisurely, like people who are searching for something, some with upturned faces, others leaning forward over the saddle as though to look underneath the bushes; altogether there were more than thirty of them.

Judge of the emotion of Louise and Catherine, seated on their sleigh in the middle of the road. They looked at each other in open-mouthed surprise. Another moment, and they would be in the midst of those bandits. The mountaineers seemed stupefied; it was impossible to return: on one side the meadow slope to descend, on the other the mountain to climb. The old farm-mistress, in her distress, took Louise by the arm, exclaiming: "Let us escape into the woods!"

She attempted to get out of the sleigh, but her shoe stuck fast in the straw.

Suddenly one of the Cossacks uttered a guttural exclamation, which ran through the whole line.

"We are discovered!" cried Doctor Lorquin, drawing his sword.

He had hardly said the word when a dozen shots lit up the path from one end to the other, and a regular howling of savages replied to the volley; the Cossacks crossed from the path into the meadow opposite, their

reins hanging loosely, knees squared, urging their horses to their utmost speed, and making for the keeper's house with the fleetness of stags.

"Ha ! they must be riding to the devil !" cried the doctor.

But the worthy man spoke too soon ; at two or three hundred paces down in the valley, the Cossacks suddenly wheeled round, like a flock of starlings describing a circle—then, with poised lance, and nose bent down between their horses' ears, they galloped furiously right down upon the mountaineers, uttering their hoarse war-cry : " Hurrah ! hurrah ! "

It was a terrible moment !

Frantz and the others flung themselves on the wall to cover the sledge.

Two seconds after, nothing was heard but the clashing of lances and bayonets, cries of rage answering to imprecations ; nothing seen under the shadow of the old oak, through whose branches some pale rays of light still glimmered, but horses rearing on their hind legs, wildly tossing their manes, madly striving to leap over the meadow wall, and above, veritably savage faces, with gleaming eyes, uplifted arms, hurling furious blows, advancing, retreating, and uttering wild shouts fit to make the hair stand erect upon your head.

Louise, as pale as death, and the old farm-mistress, with her long thin gray locks, were standing up in the straw.

Doctor Lorquin stood before them, parrying the blows with his sword, and all the while he was warding them off he kept shouting : " Lie down ! Death and destruction ! keep down, will you ? "

But they did not hear him.

Louise, in the midst of this tumult, of these savage shouts, thought of nothing but shielding Catherine ; and the old farm-mistress—judge of her terror!—had just recognised Yégof, on a tall, bony horse—Yégof, his tin crown on his head, his matted beard, his lance in hand, and his long sheepskin floating from his shoulders. She saw him there as plainly as if it had been broad daylight ; yes, it was he whose sinister face she beheld ten paces off, with its flaming eyes, darting forth his long blue lance and striving to reach her. What should she do ? Submit, yield to her fate ? Thus it is that the firmest natures feel themselves forced to bow before an inflexible destiny. The old woman believed herself doomed beforehand ; she believed herself foredoomed, and gazed on all those ferocious men, yelling and leaping like so many hungry wolves, aiming and receiving blows in the soft clear moonlight. She saw some struck down, and their horses, the bridle hanging over their neck, escaping into the meadow. She saw the uppermost windows in the keeper's house open on the left, and old Cuny, in his shirt-sleeves, level his gun, without daring to fire into the *mêlée*. She saw all these with singular clearness, and kept saying to herself : “The fool has returned : whatever happens, he will hang my head to his saddle. It must end as it did in my dream !”

And, in truth, everything seemed to justify her fears. The mountaineers, too inferior in number, were giving way.

There was a regular hand-to-hand encounter. The Cossacks, leaping up the ascent, fought in the path ; one sword-thrust, better directed than the others, reached the back of the old woman's head ; she felt the touch of the cold steel just in the nape of her neck.

"Oh! the wretches!" she shrieked, falling back, and supporting herself with her two hands at her back.

Doctor Lorquin himself had just been knocked against the sleigh. Frantz and the rest, surrounded by twenty Cossacks, could not run to their assistance. Louise felt a hand laid upon her shoulder; it was the hand of the fool, still bestriding his tall horse.

At this supreme moment, the poor child, mad with fear, uttered a cry of agony; at the same moment she caught sight of something shining in the dark, the pistols of Lorquin, and, quick as lightning, snatching them from the doctor's belt, she fired both shots at once, scorching the beard of Yégof, whose pale face was lit up by the flash, and shattering the skull of a Cossack who was leaning towards her, his white eyes distended with desire.

In another instant, she seized Catherine's whip, and, standing up, pale as a corpse, she lashed the flanks of the horse, who set off at full gallop. The sleigh flew wildly along; it swayed to the right and left. All of a sudden, there was a violent shock; Catherine, Louise, and all rolled in the snow down the steep descent of the ravine. The horse suddenly stopped short, thrown back upon his haunches, his mouth covered with bloody foam.

Rapid as this fall had been, Louise had seen some shadows pass like the wind behind the trees. She had heard a terrible voice, that of Divès, shout: "Forward! Stab, stab!"

It was but a vision, one of those confused apparitions such as pass before our eyes at our last hour; but as she arose, no doubt remained in the poor girl's mind;

a sharp conflict was raging at twenty paces from her, behind a ridge of trees, and Marc was shouting lustily: "Courage, lads! no quarter!"

Then she saw a dozen Cossacks climbing up the opposite side of the mountain, through the bushes, like hares, and above, in the broad light of the moon, Yégof crossing the valley at his utmost speed, like a frightened bird. Several shots were sent after him, but the fool escaped them all, and, drawing himself up to his full height in his spurs, he turned round, brandishing his lance with a defiant air, and uttering a loud hurrah in the shrill tone of a heron who has just escaped from the talons of the eagle, and wings his rapid flight through the air.

Two shots were again sent after him from the keeper's house; something, a shred of his rags, detached itself from the person of the fool, who continued his way, repeating his hurrahs in a hoarse accent while scaling the path his comrades had taken.

And all this vision disappeared as in a dream.

Then Louise turned round; Catherine was standing beside her, not less dumfounded, but not less watchful. They looked at each other for a moment, and then threw themselves into each other's arms with a feeling of inexpressible relief.

"We are saved!" murmured Catherine. And, woman-like, they both began to cry.

"You have behaved bravely," said the farm-mistress—"well, very well. Jean-Claude, Gaspard, and I, we may be proud of you."

Louise was agitated by such profound emotion that she trembled from head to foot. The danger past, her own gentle nature regained the ascendancy; she

was at a loss to account for the courage she had just shown.

In another moment, finding themselves a little recovered, they were preparing to climb back into the road, when they saw five or six of the mountaineers and the doctor coming to look after them.

"Ah! it's no use for you to cry, Louise," said Lorquin; "you are a dragon, a right-down imp. Now, your heart's in your mouth to look at you, but we all saw you at work. And, by-the-bye, my pistols—where are they?"

At this moment there was a rustling among the bushes, and the tall form of Marc Divès appeared, sword in hand, while he exclaimed:

"Holloa! Dame Catherine; those are rough adventures. A thousand thunders! what a lucky chance that I should happen to be there! Those beggars would rifle you from head to foot!"

"Yes," said the old farm-mistress, pushing her gray hair under her cap, "it is most fortunate."

"Fortunate! Ah! I believe you. It is not more than ten minutes since I arrived with my ammunition waggon at Cuny's house. 'Don't go to the Donon,' said he to me; 'for the last hour the sky has been all red on that side. There is fighting going on there, you may be sure.' 'You think so?' 'Yes, I do indeed.' 'Then Joson shall go out and look about and see how the land lays.' 'Good.' Joson had no sooner gone than I hear shouts like five hundred devils. 'What's the matter, Cuny?' 'Can't say.' We push the door open, and we see the hurly-burly. Ha!" continued the tall smuggler, "it did not take me long to be among them. I leap on my

good horse, Fox, and then forward. What a piece of luck!"

"Ah!" said Catherine, "if we were only sure that our affairs were going as well as the Donon, we might rejoice in good earnest."

"Yes, yes, Frantz told me all about that—that's the devil; there must be always some hitch," replied Marc. "In short—in short, we are still stuck fast here, with our feet in the snow. Let us hope that Piorette will not leave his comrades long in that plight, and now let us empty our glasses, which are still half full."

Other smugglers had just arrived, saying that that wretch of a Yégof might be back soon, with a lot more of his own sort at his back.

"That is true," replied Divès. "We will return to the Falkenstein, since that is Jean-Claude's order; but we cannot take our waggon with us; it would prevent our taking the cross-roads, and, in an hour, all those bandits would be down on us tooth and nail. Let us go, in the first place, back to Cuny's; Catherine and Louise will not be sorry to drink a cup of wine, nor the others either; it will warm their hearts for them. Come up, Bruno!"

He took the horse by the bridle. Two wounded men had just been laid on the sleigh. Two others having been killed, with seven or eight Cossacks lying dead upon the snow, their large boots wide apart, were obliged to be abandoned, and they proceeded directly towards the house of the old ranger. Frantz was consoling himself for not having been at the Donon. He had run two Cossacks through, and the sight of the inn besides tended to put him into good

humour. In front of the door the ammunition waggon was stationed. Cuny came out to meet them, exclaiming :

“Welcome, Dame Lefèvre ; what a night for women ! Sit down ! What is going on up above there ?”

Whilst they were hastily draining a bottle, he was obliged to have everything explained to him over again. The good old man, dressed in a simple jerkin and green breeches, with his wrinkled face and bald head, listened eagerly, his eyes quite round with surprise, his hands clasped as he exclaimed :

“Good God ! good God ! what times we live in ! Now-a-days you cannot go along the high road without the risk of being attacked. It is worse than the old stories of the Swedes.”

And he shook his head.

“Come,” cried Divès, “time presses ; let us be going !”

When all were ready to start, the smugglers led the waggon, which contained some thousands of cartridges and two little barrels of brandy, about five hundred yards off ; they then unharnessed the horses.

“Now, keep going on !” cried Marc, “in a few minutes we will rejoin you.”

“But what are you going to do with that vehicle there ?” asked Frantz. “Since we have not time to take it back to the Falkenstein, better put it safe under Cuny’s shed than leave it in the middle of the road.”

“Yes, to get the poor old fellow strung up when the Cossacks arrive, for they will be here before another hour. Don’t trouble yourself about anything. I know what I’m about.”

Frantz rejoined the sleigh, which set out on its way.

In a short time they passed the saw-pit, and then took a short cut to the right to reach the farm of Bois-des-Chênes, whose tall chimney was discernible three-quarters of a league off.

When they were halfway up the mountain, Marc Divès and his men overtook them, calling out to them: "Halt! stop a little while. Look down below there."

And they all, having looked behind towards the bottom of the gorge, saw the Cossacks caracoling round the cart, to the number of two or three hundred.

"They are here! Let us fly!" cried Louise.

"Stay a little," replied the smuggler; "we have nothing to fear."

He was just speaking, when an immense sheet of flame extended its two crimson wings from one mountain to the other, illuminating the woods and rocks to their very summits, as well as the little house of the ranger, then came such an explosion that it made the very earth tremble.

And as all the bewildered spectators stood looking at each other, for the moment speechless and spell-bound with fear, Marc's loud peals of laughter mingled with the sounds that still rang in their ears.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he exclaimed, "I was sure that the beggars would stop around the waggon to drink my brandy, and that the match would have time to reach the powder! You think they are likely to follow us, do you? I tell you what, their arms and legs are by this time hanging to the branches of the fir-trees! Come on; and may Heaven do as much to all those who attempt to cross the Rhine!"

All the escort, the mountaineers, the doctor—everybody, had grown silent again. So many terrible

emotions inspired each one with endless thought, quite different from those of ordinary life. They could not help saying to themselves : " What are men, thus to destroy, torment, devour, and ruin each other ? What have they done, that they should hate each other so ? And what can the ferocious spirit that excites them to it be, if it's not the devil himself ? "

Divès and his men alone could behold such things unmoved; and while they galloped away, laughed and applauded themselves.

" For my part," said the tall smuggler, " I never saw such a capital joke. Ha ! ha ! ha ! I shall never stop laughing at it, if I live for a thousand years. "

Then all of a sudden a gloom came over him, and he exclaimed :

" For all that, this must be Yégof's work. We must be blind not to see that it is he who led the Germans to the Blutfeld. I should be sorry if he had met his end by the blowing up of my cart. I have something better in store for him. All I desire is, that he may keep all right until we chance to meet each other somewhere in the corner of a wood. If I have to wait a year, ten, twenty years, no matter, so it comes at last. The longer I shall have waited, the better my appetite will be : tit-bits are good cold, like boar's head cooked in white wine. "

He said this in a laughing, good-humoured way, but those who knew him augured from it no good to Yégof.

In half an hour after they had all arrived before the farm of Bois-des-Chênes.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JERÔME DE ST. QUIRIN had safely effected his retreat upon the farm. Since midnight he had occupied the rising ground on which it stood.

"Who goes there?" was the challenge of the sentinels as the escort approached.

"It is us—us from the village of Charmes," replied Mare Divès in his stentorian voice.

They were recognised and allowed to pass.

The farm was wrapped in silence. An armed sentinel was walking up and down before the barn, where about thirty of the mountaineers were asleep upon some straw. Catherine, at sight of those heavy gabled roofs, those old outhouses, those stables, of all that ancient dwelling-place within whose walls she had passed her youth, where her father and her grandfather had tranquilly spent their peaceful and industrious lives, and which she was about to abandon, perhaps for ever, Catherine felt a terrible oppression of the heart; but she kept the feeling to herself, and springing from the sleigh, just as in former times she used to return from market:

"Well, Louise," said she, "here we are at home again, thanks be to God."

Old Duchêne had come and opened the door, exclaiming:

"Ah! is it you, Madame Lefèvre?"

"Yes, it is us! No news of Jean-Claude?"

"No, Madam."

Then they all went into the large kitchen.

Some embers were still blazing on the hearth, and under shadow of the immense chimney-piece was sitting Jérôme de Saint-Quirin, with his large cloth hood, his sandy pointed beard, his thick stick between his knees, and his carbine resting against the wall.

"Good-morrow, Jérôme," said the old farm-mistress.

"Good-morrow, Catherine," answered the grave and solemn leader of the Grosmann, "you come from the Donon?"

"Yes. Things are taking a bad turn, my poor Jérôme! we were obliged to leave the farm, because it was attacked by the *kaiserlicks*. There was nothing but white uniforms to be seen on every side. They were just beginning to pass the barricades."

"Then you think that Hullin will be obliged to abandon the position?"

"If Piorette does not come to his assistance, it is possible!"

The mountaineers had drawn near the fire. Marc Divès was stooping over the ashes to light his pipe; as he raised himself up, he exclaimed:

"For my part, Jérôme, I only wish to ask you one thing: I know already that the men under your command fought well."

"We did our duty," replied the shoemaker; "there are sixty men lying dead on the side of the Grosmann, who will be able to say as much at the last judgment."

"Yes; but who, then, was it that acted as guide to

the Germans? They could not of themselves have found out the passage of the Blutfeld."

"It is Yégof, the fool Yégof," said Jérôme, whose gray eyes, circled by deep wrinkles, and overhung by thick white eyebrows, seemed really to flash with fire as he spoke.

"Ah! You are quite sure of it?"

"Labarbe's men saw him in the act—he was leading the others."

The mountaineers regarded each other with looks of indignation.

At this moment Doctor Lorquin, who had stayed outside to unharness the horse, opened the door, exclaiming:

"The pass is lost! Here are our men from the Donon; I have just heard Lagarmitte's horn."

It is easy to imagine the emotion of the bystanders. Every one began to think of the relations, the friends, whom he might perhaps never see again, and all, including those in the kitchen and the barn, rushed out to learn the news. At the same moment, Robin and Dubourg, who were placed as sentinels on the Bois-des-Chênes, exclaimed:

"Who goes there?"

"France," replied a voice.

And, in spite of the distance, Louise, thinking she recognised her father's voice, was seized with such a sudden emotion, that Catherine was obliged to support her in her arms.

Almost immediately the sound of a number of footsteps was heard upon the hard crisp snow, and Louise, no longer able to contain herself, cried out, in a trembling voice:

"Papa Jean-Claude!"

"Here I am," replied Hullin, "here I am!"

"My father?" exclaimed Frantz Materne, running to meet Jean-Claude.

"He is with us, Frantz."

"And Kasper?"

"He has received a little scratch; nothing worth speaking of; you will see them both directly."

At the same moment Catherine threw herself into Hullin's arms.

"Oh! Jean-Claude, what happiness to see you again!"

"Yes," said the brave man, in a sorrowful tone, "there are many who will never behold those they love again."

"Frantz," old Materne was then heard calling out, "here! this way!"

And on all sides nothing was to be seen but people looking for each other, shaking hands and embracing. Others were calling, "Niclau! Sapheri!" but from more than one no answer came.

Then the voices grew hoarse, as if stifling, and ended by being silent. The joy of some, and the consternation of others, imparted a sort of terror to the scene.

Louise was weeping freely in Hullin's arms.

"Ah! Jean-Claude," said Dame Lefèvre, "you have got something to hear about that child there. At present I shall not tell you anything, except that we were attacked."

"Oh! yes. We will talk of all that by-and-by. We have no time to lose now," said Hullin. "The pass of the Donon is lost, the Cossacks may be here by day-break, and we have still many things to do."

He turned the corner and entered the farm; every one followed him. Duchêne had just thrown a fresh log on to the fire. Those faces blackened with powder, still flushed with fighting, their garments torn by bayonets, some stained with blood, advancing from the shadowy darkness outside into the full light cast by the blazing fire, presented a singular and striking spectacle. Kasper had his forehead bound up with his handkerchief, having received a cut from a sabre. His bayonet, the front of his dress, and his long blue cloth gaiters were spotted with blood. As for old Materne, he, thanks to his imperturbable presence of mind, returned safe and sound from the strife and carnage. The remnants of the two troops of Jérôme and Hullin thus found themselves re-united.

There were the same wild figures, inspired by the same energy and the same spirit of vengeance; only the latter, harassed by fatigue, were sitting right and left, on logs of wood, on the edge of the sink, on the low stones of the hearth, with their head between their hands, their elbows on their knees. Others were staring vacantly about them, and not being able to convince themselves of the disappearance of Hans, and Joson, and Daniel, were exchanging questions, which were followed by long intervals of silence. Materne's two sons were holding each other by the arm, as if they were afraid of losing one another, and their father, behind them, leaning against the wall, with his elbow resting on his gun, was regarding them with a contented air. "There they are; I see them," he seemed to be saying to himself; "they are famous fellows! They have both come off with whole skins." And the worthy man coughed

gently behind his hand. If any one came to him to ask about Pierre, or Jacques, or Nicolas, he would answer at random: "Yes, yes; there are plenty of them down below there lying on their backs. But what would you have? It's the fortune of war. Your Nicolas has done his duty. You must console yourself with that." And in the meanwhile he was thinking to himself: "Mine are not left in the lurch; that's what I care about most."

Catherine was laying the table, assisted by Louise. In a short time, Duchêne came up from the cellar with a barrel of wine on his shoulder, which he placed on the dresser; he tapped it, and then every one of the mountaineers brought his glass, his mug, or his jug, and filled it from the purple stream that glistened in the blazing light of the fire.

"Eat and drink!" cried the good farm-mistress; "it is not over yet, and you've still need of all your strength. Here, Frantz, take down those hams for me. Here is bread, knives; and now sit down, my children."

Frantz made a spit of his bayonet, and hung up the hams in the wide fire-place.

They drew the benches forward, they sat down, and, in spite of their grief, proceeded to eat with that vigorous appetite of which neither present griefs nor cares for the future can wholly deprive strong men. But that did not prevent a poignant sorrow clutching at the heart of these brave fellows, and first one and then another would suddenly stop, and, laying down his fork, quit the table, saying, "I have had enough."

While the mountaineers were thus repairing their strength, their leaders were assembled in the next room, making fresh dispositions for the defence. They were

sitting round the table, lighted by a solitary tin lamp; Doctor Lorquin, with his great dog Pluto by his side, Jérôme in the angle of a window on the right, Hullin on the left, quite pale. Marc Divès, with his elbow on the table, his cheek on his hand, had his broad shoulders turned to the door: he only showed his brown profile and one of the corners of his long moustache. Materne alone remained standing, as usual, against the wall, behind Lorquin's chair, his gun at his feet. From the kitchen came the hum of voices.

When Catherine, sent for by Hullin, entered, she heard a sort of groaning sound which caused her to start. It was Hullin who was speaking.

"All those brave lads, all those fathers of families who fell one after the other," he was saying, in a tone of bitter grief, "do you think that it does not wring my very heart? Do you think that I would not rather a thousand times over have been massacred myself? Ah! You know not what I have suffered this night! To lose your own life is nothing, but to bear alone the weight of such a responsibility——!"

He was silent, but the quivering of his lips, a tear that rolled slowly down his cheek, his very attitude, all showed the scruples of the honest man, and that he found himself in a situation where conscience herself hesitates and seeks fresh support. Catherine went very gently and seated herself in a large arm-chair on the left. After a few seconds, Hullin added, in a calmer tone: "Between eleven o'clock and midnight, Zimmer arrived, shouting, 'We are taken in the rear! The Germans are coming down from the Grosmann; Labarbe is dead; Jérôme cannot hold out any longer!' And then he said no more. What was to be done?"

Could I beat a retreat? Could I abandon a position which had cost us so much blood, the pass of the Donon, the road to Paris? If I had done so, should I not have been a poltroon? But I had only three hundred men against four thousand at Grandfontaine, and I don't know how many who came down from the mountain! Well, cost what it would, I resolved to hold out. It was our duty. I said to myself: 'Life is nothing without honour! We will all die; but it shall never be said that we have surrendered the road to France. No, no; it shall never be said!'

As he spoke these words, Hullin's voice again shook with emotion, his eyes filled with tears, and he added: "We held our post; my brave children held it until two o'clock. I saw them fall around me. As they fell they shouted: 'Hurrah for France!' At the beginning of the action, I had sent to warn Piorette. He arrived at full speed, with about fifty good men. It was already too late; the enemy poured down on us right and left; they held three parts of the ground, and drove us back into the fir-forests on the side of the Blanru; we could not stand against their fire. All that I could do was to collect my wounded, those who were still able to drag themselves away, and place them under the escort of Piorette. About a hundred of my men joined him. For myself, I kept only fifty to go and occupy the Falkenstein. We cut our way through the Germans who would have stopped our retreat. Fortunately the night was dark; but for that, not a soul among us would have escaped. This, then, is the state of things with us; all is lost! The Falkenstein alone is left to us, and we are reduced to three hundred men. The thing is now to know whether we are determined to go

on to the end. For myself, I have told you it is painful to me to bear such a heavy responsibility alone. As long as it was a question of defending the pass of the Donon, there could be no doubt about the matter: every one owes his life to his country; but this pass is lost; we should want ten thousand men to enable us to re-take it, and at this very moment the enemy is entering Lorraine. Now then, what is to be done?"

"We must go on to the end," said Jérôme.

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the others.

"Is this your opinion, Catherine?"

"Certainly!" exclaimed the old farm-mistress, whose features expressed inflexible firmness.

Then Hullin, in a firmer tone, proceeded to disclose his plan.

"The Falkenstein is our point of retreat. It is our arsenal; it is there that we have our ammunition; the enemy know it, and will attempt to storm it. To prevent that, we must all of us here present hasten thither to its defence; all the country round must see us, so that they may be able to say—Catherine Lefèvre, Jérôme, Materne and his sons, Hullin, Doctor Lorquin, are there. They will not lay down their arms! This thought will reanimate the courage of all honest people. At the same time, Piorette will hold himself in readiness in the woods; his followers will increase every day. The country will soon be overrun with Cossacks—with robbers of every description. As soon as the enemy shall have entered Lorraine, I will make a signal to Piorette; he will throw himself between the Donon and the road, and all the stragglers scattered over the mountain will be caught, as in a net. We may also profit by favourable chances to carry off

the convoys of the Germans, harass their reserves, and, if fortune favours us as we must hope, and all these *kaiserlicks* should be beaten in Lorraine by our army, we shall then be able to cut off their retreat."

Every one rose, and Hullin, entering the kitchen, made this simple address to the mountaineers :

"My friends, we have just decided to resist to the very last. At the same time, every one is free to do as he likes, to lay down his arms, to return to his village ; but let those who desire to avenge themselves assemble with us ; they shall share our last bit of bread and our last cartridge."

The old bargeman Colon rose and said :

"Hullin, we are all with you ; we have begun to fight all together, and we shall finish all together."

"Yes, yes!" cried out all the others.

"You have all decided, then? Very well! listen to me. Jérôme's brother will take the command."

"My brother is dead," interrupted Jérôme ; "he is lying on the side of the Grosmann."

There was a moment's silence ; then, in a firm voice, Hullin continued :

"Colon, you will take the command of all those who are left, with the exception of the men who formed the escort of Catherine Lefèvre, and whom I shall retain with me. You will go and rejoin Piorette in the valley of the Blanru by the way of the Two Rivers."

"And the ammunition?" inquired Marc Divès.

"I have brought back my waggon," said Jérôme ; "Colon can make use of it."

"Let the sleigh be got ready as well," exclaimed Catherine ; "when the Cossacks come they will plunder everything. We must not let our people go away

empty-handed; let them take away the oxen, the cows, and the goats; let them carry off everything; it is so much lost for the enemy."

Five minutes after, the farm was being completely stripped of everything; they were loading the sleigh with hams, smoked meats, bread; leading the cattle from the stables, harnessing the horses to the great waggon; and in a short time the convoy set out on its march, with Robin at the head, and the volunteers behind, pushing at the wheels. When it had disappeared in the woods, and silence suddenly succeeded to all this noise, Catherine, as she turned round, saw Hullin behind her as pale as death.

"Well, Catherine," said he, "all is settled."

Frantz, Kasper, and those who formed the escort, all stood ready armed and waiting in the kitchen.

"Duchêne," said the brave woman, "do you go down to the village; we must not have the enemy ill-treating you on my account."

The old servant then, shaking his white head, and with his eyes full of tears, replied:

"So that I but die here, Madame Lefèvre. It is fifty years since I first came to the farm. Do not force me to go away from it; it would be my death."

"As you will, my poor Duchêne," replied Catherine, greatly moved at this proof of her old servant's fidelity. "Here are the keys of the house."

And the poor old man went and sat down on a stool beside the hearth, with his eyes fixed, and his mouth half open, like one lost in a sad and bewildering dream.

They set out on their way to the Falkenstein. Marc Divès on horseback, his long rapier in his hand, formed

the rear-guard. Frantz and Hullin were on the left overlooking the mountain side; Kasper and Jérôme on the right of the valley; Materne and the men of the escort surrounded the women.

Strange to say, in front of the cottages of the village of Charmes, on the doorsteps of the houses, at the casements, at the windows, appeared faces young and old, watching with curious eyes this flight of Dame Lefèvre, and evil tongues did not spare her.

"Ah! she's come to ruin at last," said they. "This comes of meddling with what does not concern you!"

Others made the reflection aloud that Catherine had been rich quite long enough, and that it was now her turn to come down in the world. As for the industry, the wisdom, the goodness of heart, and all the other virtues of the good old farm-mistress, the patriotism of Jean-Claude, the courage of Jérôme, and Materne and his two sons, the disinterestedness of Doctor Lorquin, the devotion of Marc Divès, no one said anything about them—they were conquered!



CHAPTER XXIV.

AT the bottom of the valley of the Bouleaux, about two gun-shots from the village of Charmes, on the left, the little troop began to ascend slowly the footpath of the old *burg*. Hullin, remembering that he had followed the same road when he went to buy powder of Marc Divès, could not help a feeling of deep sadness from stealing over him. Then, in spite of his journey to Phalsbourg, in spite of the spectacle of the wounded of Hanau and of Leipzig, in spite of the old sergeant's recital, he despaired of nothing; he preserved all his energy, and had no fear of the success of the defence. Now all was lost: the enemy was descending on Lorraine, the mountaineers were flying. Marc Divès was riding slowly by the side of the wall through the snow; his big horse, accustomed, no doubt, to this journey, kept neighing, tossing up his head, and dropping it down again on his breast, in sudden jerks. The smuggler turned round in his saddle from time to time, to throw a glance back on the farm of Bois-des-Chênes they were quitting. Suddenly he exclaimed:

"Hi! here are the Cossacks in sight!"

At this exclamation all the troops halted to look about. They were already a good way up the mountain, above the village and even the farm of Bois-des-Chênes.

The gray wintry dawn was dispersing the mists of morning, and amid the recesses of the mountain were visible the forms of several Cossacks, with head erect, pistol in hand, approaching at a slow pace the old homestead. They were advancing cautiously, and seemed as if they feared a surprise. A few moments after, others appeared in sight, ascending the valley of the Houx, then others still, and all in the same attitude, standing up in their stirrups, to see as far off as possible, like men who are hoping to discover something. The first comers, having passed the farm and observing nothing threatening, waved their lances and wheeled half-round. All the others then galloped up to the spot, like crows following one of their number who has taken wing, supposing he has just discovered a prey. In a few seconds the farm was surrounded, the door opened. Two minutes later, there was a crashing of glass, and out through the windows came furniture, mattresses, and linen tumbling about in all directions. Catherine, with her hooked nose drawn down to her very lip, looked calmly on this scene of ravage. For a long time she said nothing, but suddenly seeing Yégof, whom she had not perceived until then, strike Duchêne with the butt of his lance, and push him out of the farm, she could not restrain a cry of indignation:

“Oh! the brute! What a coward he must be to strike a poor old man, who cannot defend himself. Ah! the wretch!”

“Come, Catherine,” said Jean-Claude, “we’ve seen enough of it; there’s no good in feasting your eyes on that!”

“You are right,” said the old farm-mistress; “let

us go: I should be tempted to go down among them to avenge myself single-handed."

The higher they ascended the mountain, the clearer and sharper grew the air. Louise, the true daughter of the *Heimathslös*, with a little basket of provisions on her arm, was climbing the steep side at the head of the troop. The pale blue sky, the plains of Alsace and Lorraine, and, quite on the verge of the horizon, those of Champagne, all that boundless expanse stretching far as the eye could reach, excited in her breast feelings of the deepest enthusiasm. She seemed as if she had wings to skim the azure vault of heaven, like those great birds which sweep down from the tops of the trees to the abyss below uttering their cry of freedom. All the miseries of this lower world, all its injustices and its sufferings, were forgotten. In fancy Louise again saw herself just a little creature on the back of her mother, the poor strolling gipsy, and said to herself: "I was never more happy, never had less care, never laughed and sang so much! And yet we often wanted bread then. Ah! those were happy days!" And then snatches of old songs would come back to her mind.

At the approaches to the rock, which was of a reddish-brown, incrustated with large black and white pebbles, and inclining over the precipice like the arches of an immense cathedral, Louise and Catherine stopped in an ecstasy of surprise and delight at the scene that lay before them. Overhead, the firmament appeared to them still more spacious, the path cut in the rock still narrower. The valleys stretching away far out of sight, the endless woods, the distant lakes and pools of Lorraine, the narrow streamlet of the Rhine like a blue

riband on their right. This grand spectacle touched them deeply, and the old farm-mistress said, with a sort of enthusiasm:

“Jean-Claude, He who has cut this rock that towers to the skies, who has hollowed out these valleys, who has planted the trees, the shrubs, and the mosses of the forest, He will render us the justice we deserve.”

As they stood thus regarding the steep and lofty rock, Marc Divès led his horse into a cavern near at hand, then he returned, and beginning the ascent before them, he said to them:

“Take care; it is very slippery.”

At the same time he pointed out to them, on their right, the blue precipice with the tops of the tall fir-trees at the bottom.

Every one became silent until they came to the terrace where the vault began. Arrived there, each one seemed to breathe more freely. They saw, about halfway, the smugglers, Brenn, Pfeifer, and Toubac, with their large gray cloaks, and black felt hats, sitting round a fire which seemed to extend the whole length of the rock. Marc Divès said to them:

“Here we are. The *kaiserlicks* have got the upper hand. Zimmer has been killed to-night. Is Hexe-Baizel up above there?”

“Yes,” replied Brenn, “she is making cartridges.”

“They may be of use still,” said Marc; “keep your eye open, and if you see any one approaching, fire upon him.”

The Maternes had stopped on the edge of the rock, and those three tall red fellows, their felt hats pushed back, their powder-flask on their hip, carbine on shoulder, long muscular legs firmly planted on the solid point of

the rock, formed a strange and striking group. Old Materne, with outstretched hand, was pointing out at a distance, very far off, an almost imperceptible white speck in the middle of the fir forests, saying :

“Do you know what that is, boys?”

And they all three looked at it with half-closed eyes.

“It is our house,” replied Kasper.

“Poor Magrédel!” replied the old huntsman, after a moment’s silence. “How uneasy she must have been for the last week! What vows has she not offered up for us to Saint Odile!”

Just at this moment, Marc Divès, who was in front, uttered a cry of surprise. “Dame Lefèvre,” said he, suddenly stopping short, “the Cossacks have set fire to your farm!”

Catherine received this news with the utmost calmness, and advanced to the very edge of the terrace; Louise and Jean-Claude followed her. The bottom of the abyss was covered with a thick white cloud; through this cloud was to be seen a bright spark in the direction of Bois-des-Chênes, and nothing more; but at intervals, when there was a gust of wind, the fire was distinctly visible. The two tall black gables, the haystack on fire, the little stables with flames bursting from them; then all disappeared again.

“’Tis already nearly over,” said Hullin, in a low voice.

“Yes,” replied the old farm-mistress, “there goes forty years of labour and toil; but no matter—they cannot burn our good lands, the broad meadows of the Eichmath. We will set to work again. Gaspard and Louise will put that all right. I do not repent of what I have done.”

After about a quarter of an hour, there was a regular volley of sparks, and then the whole lay in ruins. The black gables alone were left standing. They then resumed their way up the steep and rocky footpath. As they reached the upper terrace, they heard the sharp voice of Hexe-Baizel :

"Is it you, Catherine?" she exclaimed. "Ah! I never thought that you would come and see me in my poor hole."

Hexe-Baizel and Catherine Lefèvre had formerly been school-fellows together, so they now addressed each other in a familiar manner.

"Nor I either," replied the old farm-mistress ; "but no matter, Baizel, in misfortune we are always glad to meet with an old friend of our childhood." Baizel seemed touched by the remark.

"All that is here, Catherine, is yours," she exclaimed—"all!"

She pointed to her poor stool, her besom of green broom, and the five or six billets of wood on her hearth. Catherine looked around for some moments in silence, and said :

"It is not much, but it is solid ; one comfort, they will not burn your house down."

"No, they will not burn it," said Hexe-Baizel, with a laugh ; "they would want a large quantity of wood even to warm it a little. He! he! he!"

The volunteers, after so many fatigues, felt in need of repose, so every one hastened to rest his gun against the wall, and to stretch himself upon the ground. Marc Divès opened the door of the inner cavern for them, where they were at least under shelter ; then he went out with Hullin to examine the position.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON the rock of the Falkenstein, at its very highest point, rises a round tower hollowed out at its base. This tower, covered with brambles, white thorns, and myrtles, seems as old as the mountain itself. Neither French, Germans, nor Swedes have been able to destroy it. The stone and the cement are united so firmly, that not the least fragment can be detached. It has a gloomy and mysterious aspect, which carries you back to bygone times to which the memory of man cannot reach. At the period of the passage of the wild geese, Marc Divès used frequently to lie in ambush there when he had nothing better to do, and sometimes at the fall of day, just as the flocks were arriving through the mist, and describing a large circuit before retiring to rest, he would bring down two or three, to the great delight of Hexe-Baizel, who was always very eager to put them on the spit. Often, too, in the autumn, Marc would spread his nets among the bushes, into which the thrushes would drop without even a struggle; so that, in short, the old tower served him as a sort of storehouse.

How many times had Hexe-Baizel, when the north wind blew hard enough to tear the horns from off the oxen, and the noise, the cracking of the branches, and the hoarse groaning of the surrounding forests ascended on high like the clamour of an angry sea—how many times

had Hexe-Baizel been nearly carried away as far as the Kilbéri opposite? But she would cling to the bushes with both hands, and the wind but succeeded in shaking out her red locks.

Divès, having noticed that his wood, from being often covered with snow and steeped with rain, gave out more smoke than flame, had sheltered the old tower with a roof made of planks. On this subject the smuggler had a singular story to relate: He asserted that he had discovered while fixing the rafters, at the bottom of a fissure, an owl as white as snow, blind, and feeble, provided in abundance with field-mice and bats. For this reason he had christened her the *Grandmother of the Land*, supposing that all the birds came and brought her food on account of her extreme old age and feebleness.

At the close of this day, the mountaineers placed in observation, like the dwellers in a vast hotel, on all the ridges of the rock, saw the white uniforms appear in the neighbouring gorges. They were issuing in vast masses from all sides at once, which showed clearly their intention of blockading the Falkenstein. Marc Divès, seeing that, grew more thoughtful.

"If they surround us," thought he, "we shall no longer be able to procure provisions; we shall have to surrender or perish with hunger."

They could perfectly distinguish the staff officers of the enemy's forces, riding leisurely round the fountain in the village of Charmes. There, too, was one of the great leaders, heavy of body, with a fat paunch, who was surveying the rock with a long telescope; behind him stood Yégof, whom the officer turned round from time to time to question. The women and children

formed a circle further off, looking wonderingly on, and five or six Cossacks were caracoling round. The smuggler could not restrain himself any longer; he took Hullin aside:

"Look," said he, "at that long file of shakos appearing all along the Sarre; and on this side too, others who are ascending from the valley like hares, with long strides; they are *kaiserlicks*, are they not? Well, what are they going to do there, Jean-Claude?"

"They are going to surround the mountain."

"That is very clear. How many do you think there are?"

"From three to four thousand men."

"Without counting those who are dispersed throughout the country. Well, what would you have Piorette do against this host of vagabonds, with his three hundred men? I ask you that plainly, Hullin."

"He can do nothing," replied the brave man, simply. "The Germans know that our ammunition is at the Falkenstein; they fear a rising after their entry into Lorraine, and wish to protect their rear. Their general has discovered that he cannot subdue us by main force; he has resolved to reduce us by famine. All that, Marc, is positive, but we are men, we will do our duty; we will die here!"

There was a moment's silence; Marc Divès knit his brow, and did not seem at all convinced.

"We will die!" he exclaimed, scratching the back of his head. "For my part, I don't at all see why we should die; that does not enter into my ideas, there are too many people who would be delighted at it!"

"What would you do, then?" said Hullin, in a dry tone—"would you surrender?"

"I surrender!" exclaimed the smuggler. "Do you take me for a coward?"

"Then explain yourself."

"This evening I set out for Phalsbourg: I risk my skin by crossing the enemy's lines, but I like that better than to cross my arms here and perish by famine. I shall either enter the place at the first sortie or endeavour to gain an outpost. The Governor, Meunier, knows me. I have sold him tobacco for the last three years. Like you, he has served in the campaigns of Italy and Egypt. Well, I shall lay the case before him. I shall see Gaspard Lefèvre. I will do so much that they will perhaps give us a company. We want nothing but the uniform, do you see, Jean-Claude, and we are saved. All that are left of our brave fellows will join Piorette, and, in any case, we may be relieved. In short, that is my idea; what do you think of it?"

He looked at Hullin, whose fixed and gloomy eye disturbed him.

"Come, is there not a chance?"

"It is an idea," said Jean-Claude at length. "I do not oppose it."

And, in his turn, looking the smuggler straight in the face:

"You swear to me to do your utmost to gain entrance to the place?"

"I swear nothing at all," replied Marc, whose brown cheeks were suffused with a sudden red. "I leave here all that I have: my property, my wife, my comrades, Catherine Lefèvre, and yourself—my oldest friend. If I do not return, I shall be a traitor; but, if I do return, Jean-Claude, you shall give me a little explanation of

the question you have just put to me: we have a little account to settle together!"

"Marc," said Hullin, "forgive me; I have suffered too much these last few days! I have been wrong; misfortune makes me mistrustful. Give me your hand! Go, save us, save Catherine, save my child! I say this to you now; we have no resource but in you."

Hullin's voice trembled: Divès allowed himself to be moved by it; only he added:

"For all that, Jean-Claude, you should not have spoken so to me at such a moment; let us never speak of it again! I will leave my skin by the way, or else return to deliver you; this very evening at night time, I will set forth! The *kaiserlicks* are already encircling the mountain; no matter, I have a good horse, and, besides, I've always been lucky."

By six o'clock the loftiest of the mountain tops were wrapped in darkness. Hundreds of fires sparkling at the bottom of the gorges announced that the Germans were preparing their evening meal. Marc Divès descended the footpath on tiptoe. Hullin listened a few seconds longer to the sound of his comrade's footsteps; then he directed his own, in a meditative mood, towards the old tower where the headquarters had been established. He raised the thick woollen covering which shut in the owl's nest, and saw Catherine, Louise, and the others crouching round a little fire which threw its feeble light upon the grey walls. The old farm-mistress, seated on a block of oak, with her hands clasped round her knees, was watching the flame with fixed eye, compressed lips, and livid complexion; Louise, leaning with her back against the wall, seemed absorbed in a dream; Jérôme, standing behind Cathe-

rine, with his hands crossed upon his stick, touched with his thick otter-skin cap the rotten roof. All were sad and dispirited. Hexe-Baizel, who was lifting up the lid of a saucepan, and Doctor Lorquin, who was scraping the mortar of the old wall with the point of his sword, alone preserved their wonted aspect.

"Here we are," said the doctor, "come back to the time of the Triboques. These walls are more than two thousand years old. A good quantity of water must have flowed from the heights of the Falkenstein and the Grosmann, by the Sarre to the Rhine, since a fire was lit in this tower."

"Yes," replied Catherine, like one awaking from a dream; "and many others beside us have suffered here cold, hunger, and poverty. Who has known of it? No one. And in a hundred, two hundred, three hundred years, others, perhaps, will come again to seek shelter in this same place. They will find, like us, the cold wall, the damp earth. They will make a little fire. They will look round as we do. And they will say, like us: 'Who has suffered before us here? Why have they suffered? They were then pursued, hunted, as we are, to come and hide themselves in this miserable hole.' And they will think of times past, and none will be able to reply to them!"

Jean-Claude had approached. In a few seconds, the old farm-mistress, raising her head, began to say, as she regarded him:

"Well! We are surrounded—the enemy wants to reduce us by famine!"

"It is true, Catherine," replied Hullin. "I did not expect that. I reckoned on an attack by main force; but the *kaiserlicks* are not yet quite as far advanced as

they think. Divès has just set out for Phalsbourg; he is acquainted with the governor of the place. And if they will send only a few hundred men to our succour——”

“We must not count upon it,” interrupted the old woman. “Marc may be taken or killed by the Germans. And then, even suppose that he succeeds in crossing their lines, how will he be able to enter Phalsbourg? You know well that the place is besieged by the Russians!”

Then every one became silent.

Hexe-Baizel soon after brought the soup, and they made a circle round the steaming bowl.



CHAPTER XXVI.

CATHERINE LEFEVRE went out of the old cavern about seven o'clock in the morning; Louise and Hexe-Baizel were still asleep; but broad daylight, the splendid daylight of the upper regions, was already streaming through every abyss. At the bottom, through the bright azure, were outlined the woods, the valleys, and the rocks as clearly as the mosses and pebbles of a lake beneath its crystal waters. Not a breath disturbed the air; and Catherine, in presence of this spectacle of boundless nature, felt herself calmer, more tranquil than even in sleep.

"What," said she, to herself, "are our petty troubles of a day, our trials and vexations? Why weary Heaven with our murmurs? Why dread the future? All this only lasts but for a second. Our complaints are of no more account than the cry of the grasshopper in autumn: do its cries prevent winter from coming? Must not the times and seasons be accomplished, and all die to be born again? We have been dead before and have returned again; we shall die again, and again return. And the mountains, with their forests, their rocks, and their ruins, will be ever there to say to us: 'Remember! Remember! Thou hast seen me; behold me again; and thou shalt see me again from generation to generation!'"

Thus mused the old woman, and the future no longer made her afraid; thoughts for her were only memories.

And while she was standing there for a few moments, all of a sudden a hum of voices struck upon her ear; she turned, and saw Hullin with the three smugglers, who were conversing gravely together on the other side of the plateau. They had not perceived her, and seemed engaged in a serious discussion.

Old Brenn, standing on the edge of the rock, with the blackened stump of a pipe between his teeth, his cheek wrinkled like an old cabbage-leaf, his round nose, gray moustache, flabby eyelid drooping over his blood-shot eye, and the long sleeves of his gaberdine falling by his side, was looking at the different points which Hullin was showing him on the mountain; and the two others, wrapped in their long gray cloaks, were pacing to and fro, shading their brows with their hands, and seeming absorbed in profound attention.

Catherine drew near, and soon she heard:

"Then you do not believe it will be possible to descend on either side?"

"No, Jean-Claude, there is no way," replied Brenn, "those brigands know the country, every inch of it; all the paths are guarded. See, look at the deer pasture all along that pond; the preventive officers never had a thought of even noticing it; well, the Allies are defending it. And, below there, the passage of the Rothstein, a regular goat-walk, which you never pass above once in ten years—you can see the glitter of a bayonet behind the rock, can you not? And that other here, where I have carried on my little game for

eight years without ever meeting a gendarme—they are holding that too. The very devil himself must have shown them the defiles.”

“Yes!” exclaimed the tall Toubac, “and if it is not the devil who has put his foot in it, it must, at least, be Yégof.”

“But,” replied Hullin, “it seems to me as if three or four firm determined men might carry one of those outposts.”

“No, they are supported one by the other ; at the first report of a gun, you would have a regiment upon your back,” replied Brenn. “Besides, supposing we should have a chance of passing, how should we return with provisions ? For my part, this is my opinion : The thing is impossible !”

There was a silence of some moments.

“But still,” said Toubac, “if Hullin wishes it, we will try, all the same.”

“We will try what ?” said Brenn, “to break our backs in trying to escape ourselves, and leave the others in the net. It’s all the same to me ; if the rest go—I go ! But as to saying that we shall return with provisions, I maintain that it’s impossible. Let us see, Toubac, by which way would you pass, and by which way would you return ? It’s no use in this case promising ; you must perform. If you know a passage, tell it me. For twenty years I have beaten the mountain with Marc, and I know every road, every path within ten leagues from here, and I do not see any other passage than in heaven !”

Hullin turned round at this moment and saw Dame Lefèvre, who was standing a few paces off, and listening attentively.

"What! were you there, Catherine?" said he. "Our affairs are beginning to take a bad turn."

"Yes, I understand: there are no means of renewing our provisions."

"Our provisions," said Brenn, with a strange smile. "Do you know, Dame Lefèvre, for how long we have enough?"

"Why, for a fortnight," replied the brave woman.

"We have enough for a week," said the smuggler, emptying the ashes of his pipe upon his nail.

"It is the truth," said Hullin; "Marc Divès and I believed in an attack on the Falkenstein; we never thought the enemy would dream of beleaguering it like a fortified place. We have been mistaken!"

"And what are we going to do?" asked Catherine, turning quite pale.

"We are going to reduce every one's rations to half. If in a fortnight Marc does not arrive, we shall have nothing more—and then we shall see!"

So saying, Hullin, Catherine, and the smugglers, with heads bowed down, took their way back by the gap. They had just set foot on the descent, when at thirty paces above them appeared Materne, who was scrambling, quite out of breath, through the ruins, and clinging to the bushes to get along quicker.

"Well," exclaimed Jean-Claude, "what's going on, old fellow?"

"Ah! there you are—I was looking for you. An officer from the enemy's camp is advancing along the wall of the old *burg*, with a little white flag; he seems as if he wishes to speak with us."

Hullin, immediately continuing his way towards the

declivity of the rock, saw, in effect, a German officer standing on the wall, and who seemed to be waiting till they made a sign to him to ascend. He was within two gun-shots ; farther off were stationed five or six soldiers, with grounded arms. After having inspected this group, Jean-Claude turned and said :

"It is an officer, who comes, no doubt, to summon us to surrender the place."

"Let them send a shot at him!" exclaimed Catherine ; "it's the best answer we can make him."

All the others appeared of the same opinion, except Hullin, who, without making any observation, descended to the terrace, where the rest of the volunteers were.

"My children," said he, "the enemy sends us an envoy. We do not know what they want of us. I suppose it is a summons to lay down our arms, but it is possible it may be something else. Frantz and Kasper will go to meet him ; they will bandage his eyes at the foot of the rock, and lead him here."

No one having any objection to make, the sons of Materne slung their carbines over their shoulders, and withdrew beneath the winding archway. At the end of about ten minutes the two tall red hunters came up to the officer. There was a rapid conference between them, after which they all began to ascend the Falkenstein. As the little group came gradually nearer, they were better able to distinguish the uniform of the envoy, and even his physiognomy. He was a spare man, with rather light hair, a well-formed figure, and resolute movements. At the foot of the rock, Frantz and Kasper bandaged his eyes, and in a short time their footsteps were heard beneath the vault. Jean-

Claude going himself to meet them, untied the handkerchief, saying :

“ You desire to communicate something to me, sir ; I am ready to listen to you.”

The mountaineers were about fifteen paces from this group. Catherine Lefèvre, who was the foremost, was knitting her brows. Her bony figure, her long and hooked nose, the three or four locks of her gray hair straggling over her flat temples, and the bones of her hollow cheeks, the compression of her lips, and the fixity of her look, seemed at first to attract the attention of the German officer ; then the gentle and pale face of Louise behind her ; then Jérôme, with his long sandy beard, draped in his tunic of coarse cloth ; then old Materne, leaning upon his short carbine ; then the others ; and, finally, the high red vault, the colossal masses of which, built up of flint and granite, hung over the precipice with some withered brambles. Hexe-Baizel, behind Materne, her long besom of green broom in her hand, outstretched neck, and heel on the very edge of the rock, seemed to astonish him for a second.

He himself was the object of marked attention. You recognised in his attitude, in his long face, with its sharp outline and brown skin, in his clear grey eyes, in his slender moustache, in the delicacy of his limbs hardened by the toils of war, the marks of an aristocratic race. He had about him a mixture of the old campaigner and the man of the world—the swordsman and the diplomatist.

This reciprocal inspection terminating in the twinkling of an eye, the envoy said, in good French—

“ Is it to Commander Hullin that I have the honour to address myself ?”

"Yes, sir," replied Jean-Claude; and as the other was casting an undecided look around the circle: "Speak out, sir," he exclaimed, "that every one may hear you! When the question is one of honour and country there is no one in France that may not hear what we have to say—the women are as much concerned in the affair as we are. You have propositions to make to me; and, in the first place, on the part of whom?"

"On the part of the General commanding-in-chief. Here is my commission."

"Good! We will hear you, sir."

Then the officer, raising his voice, said in a firm tone:

"Permit me first, Commander, to tell you that you have magnificently fulfilled your duty. You have compelled the esteem of your enemies."

"In the matter of duty," replied Hullin, "there is neither more nor less; we have done our best."

"Yes," added Catherine, drily; "and since our enemies esteem us on account of that, well, they will esteem us still more in a week or a fortnight—for we are not at the end of the strife. We shall see some more of it."

The officer turned his head, and stood like one stupefied at the savage energy imprinted in the looks of the old woman.

"These are noble sentiments," he replied, after a moment's silence; "but humanity has its rights, and to shed blood wantonly is to render evil for evil."

"Then, why do you come into our country?" cried Catherine, in her sharp eagle's voice. "Quit it, and we will leave you in peace!" Then she added: "You make war like robbers; you steal, you plunder, you

burn! You deserve all to be hung. You ought to be thrown from that rock as an example!"

The officer turned pale, for the old woman appeared to him quite capable of executing her threat; he, however, recovered himself almost immediately, and replied, in a calm tone:

"I know that the Cossacks have set fire to the farm which is to be seen opposite this rock—they are ruffians, such as are to be found in the train of every army—but this solitary act proves nothing against the discipline of our troops. Your French soldiers did many such things in Germany, and particularly in the Tyrol; not content with plundering and setting fire to the villages, they mercilessly shot down every mountaineer suspected of having taken up arms in defence of his country. We might make reprisals; it would only be our right, but we are not savages; we can appreciate all that is great and noble in patriotism, even in its most unfortunate inspirations. Moreover, it is not against the French people that we are making war; it is against the Emperor Napoleon. Besides, the General, on hearing of the conduct of the Cossacks, has publicly denounced this act of vandalism, and, in addition, has decided that an indemnity should be granted to the proprietor of the farm."

"I want nothing from you," sharply interrupted Catherine; "I prefer to be left with my injustice—and to avenge myself!"

The envoy saw by the old woman's tone that he could not make her listen to reason, and that it was even dangerous to make her a reply. So he turned towards Hullin, and said:

"I am commissioned, Commander, to offer you the

honours of war, if you surrender this position. You have no provisions—we know it. In a few days, at latest, you will be compelled to lay down your arms. The esteem the General-in-Chief feels for you has alone decided him to propose to you these honourable conditions. A longer resistance would lead to no good. We are masters of the Donon; the body of our army has passed into Lorraine; it is not here the campaign will be decided—you have, therefore, no interest in defending a useless position. We wish to spare you the horrors of famine upon this rock. Come, Commander, decide!"

Hullin turned to his followers, and said to them simply: "You have heard? For my part, I refuse but I will submit if every one else accepts the proposition of the enemy?"

"We all refuse!" said Jérôme.

"Yes—yes, all!" repeated the others.

Catherine Lefèvre, hitherto inflexible, happening to look at Louise, seemed touched; she took her by the arm, and turning to the envoy, she said:

"We have a child with us; would there be no means of sending her to one of our relations at Saverne?"

No sooner had Louise heard these words, than throwing herself into Hullin's arms, with a sort of terror, she exclaimed:

"No—no! I will stay with you, Papa Jean-Claudo. I will die with you!"

"'Tis well, sir," said Hullin, quite pale; "go tell your General what you have seen; tell him that the Falkenstein will remain with us till death! Kasper, Frantz, lead back the envoy."

The officer seemed to hesitate ; but as he was opening his mouth to speak, Catherine, quite livid with rage, exclaimed :

“ Go—go ! You are not yet where you think. It is that brigand of a Yégof who has told you that we had no provisions, but we have enough for two months ; and in two months our army will have exterminated you all. The traitors will not always have it their own way. Woe be to you ! ”

And, as she was getting more and more excited, the officer judged it prudent to retire. He turned towards his guides, who replaced the bandage, and conducted him to the foot of the Falkenstein.

That which Hullin had ordered on the subject of the provisions was executed on that very day ; each one received his half-ration for the day. A sentinel was placed before the cavern of Hexe-Baizel, where the provisions were kept ; the entrance was barricaded, and Jean-Claude decided that the distributions should be made in the presence of all, in order to prevent injustice. But all these precautions could not preserve these unfortunate creatures from the horrors of famine.

For three days provisions had completely failed at the Falkenstein, and Divès had not given signs of life. How many times, during these long days of agony, had the mountaineers turned their eyes towards Phalsbourg ! how many times had they listened, thinking they heard the steps of the smuggler, whilst the vague murmur of the air alone filled space !

It was amid the tortures of hunger that the whole of the nineteenth day since the arrival of the confederates at the Falkenstein was passed. They spoke no more ;

crouched on the ground, with pinched faces, they remained lost in an endless reverie. At times they looked at each other with flashing eye, as if ready to devour each other; then they grew calm and gloomy again.

When Yégof's raven, flying from peak to peak, was seen approaching this scene of misfortune, old Materne shouldered his carbine; but immediately the bird of ill-omen would take flight at its utmost speed, uttering dismal croakings; and the arm of the old hunter fell powerless.



CHAPTER XXVII.

As if the exhaustion of hunger had not sufficed to fill up the measure of the misery they were enduring, the unhappy mountaineers, keeping their dreary vigils on the Falkenstein, only opened their mouths to threaten and accuse each other.

"Don't touch me!" screamed Hexe-Baizel, in a voice like a polecat's, to those who looked at her, "don't touch me, or I will bite you!"

Louise grew delirious; her large blue eyes, in place of real objects, saw only shadows flitting over the plateau, skimming over the tops of the trees, and plant themselves on the old tower.

"Here are provisions!" she would exclaim.

Then the others would be furious against the poor child, crying out angrily that she wanted to make game of them, and that she had best beware.

Jerôme alone still remained perfectly calm; but the great quantity of snow which he had drunk to appease the inward anguish that was consuming him, bathed all his body and his face with a cold sweat.

Doctor Lorquin had tied a handkerchief round his loins, and tightened it more and more, declaring that he thus satisfied his stomach. He was seated against the tower, with his eyes shut; from hour to hour he opened them, saying:

"We are at the first—at the second—at the third period. One day more, and all will be over!"

He would then begin a dissertation upon the Druids, on Odin, Brahma, Pythagoras, making Latin and Greek quotations, announcing the approaching transformation of the people of Harberg into wolves, into foxes, into animals of all sorts.

"For my part," he would exclaim, "I shall be a lion! I will eat fifteen pounds of beef a-day!"

Then, recovering himself:

"No, I will be a man; I will preach peace, fraternity, justice! Ah! my friends," he would say, "we suffer by our own fault. What have we done, on the other side of the Rhine, for the last ten years? By what right did we want to impose masters on those peoples? Why did we not exchange our ideas, our sentiments, the products of our arts and of our industry, with them? Why did we not go to seek them as brothers, instead of wishing to subjugate them? We should have been well received. What must they have suffered—the unfortunates—during those ten years of violence and rapine? Now they avenge themselves; and it is justice! May the curse of Heaven alight on the wretches who divide the peoples to oppress them!"

After these moments of excitement, he would sink fainting against the wall of the tower, murmuring:

"Bread. Oh, for nothing but a morsel of bread!"

The sons of Materne, crouching among the bushes, gun on shoulder, seemed to be awaiting the passage of game which never arrived; the idea of perpetual ambush sustained their expiring strength.

Some, bent double, were shivering, and felt consumed

by fever ; they accused Jean-Claude of having led them to the Falkenstein.

Hullin, with superhuman strength of character, still went and came, observing what was passing in the surrounding valleys, without saying anything.

At times he advanced to the very edge of the rock, and with his large compressed jaws, and flashing eye, watched Yégof sitting before a large fire, on the plateau of the Bois-des-Chênes, in the midst of a troop of Cossacks. Since the arrival of the Germans in the valley of the Charmes, the fool had not quitted this post ; he seemed, from there, to gloat over the agony of his victims.

Such was the aspect of these unfortunates under the vast canopy of heaven.

The punishment of hunger at the bottom of a dungeon is frightful, no doubt, but beneath a sky bathed in light, in the eyes of a whole country, in face of the resources of nature, it passes all expression.

Now at the close of this nineteenth day, between four and five o'clock in the evening, the weather had lowered : large grey clouds rose behind the snowy summit of the Grosmann ; the sun, red as a bullet just out of the furnace, was casting his last rays athwart the murky sky. The silence on the rock was profound. Louise gave no more sign of life. Kasper and Frantz continued motionless among the shrubs like stones. Catherine Lefèvre, crouching on the ground, her sharp knees between her skinny arms, her rigid and hard features, her hair hanging over her livid cheeks, with haggard eye, and chin as sharp as a vice, resembled some old sibyl sitting in the midst of the bushes. She spoke no more. That evening, Hullin, Jérôme, old Materné, and

Doctor Lorquin had assembled round the old farm-mistress to die together. They were all silent, and the last faint rays of twilight illumined the dismal group. To the right, behind a jutting point of the rock, some fires of the Germans glimmered in the abyss. And as they sat there, all at once the old woman, coming out of her long reverie, murmured at first some unintelligible words.

"Divès is here!" said she at length, in a low voice. "I see him; he is leaving the postern, to the right of the arsenal. Gaspard follows him, and——"

Then she counted slowly :

"Two hundred and fifty men," said she; "national guards and soldiers. They cross the bridge; they mount behind the half-moon. Gaspard is speaking with Mare. What is he saying?"

She appeared to listen :

"'Let us make haste; yes, make haste; time presses; there they are upon the glacis!'"

There was a moment's silence. Then all at once the old woman, drawing herself up to her full height, her arms tossed wildly aloft, hair erect, and mouth quite wide open, shouted, in a terrible voice :

"Courage! kill! kill! ah! ah!"

And she fell heavily back.

This fearful cry awakened everybody; it would have awakened the dead. All the besieged seemed to be born again. Something was in the air. Was it hope, life, soul? I know not; but all came hurrying along like a troop of deer, holding their breath to hear. Louise herself moved softly and raised her head. Frantz and Kasper dragged themselves along upon their knees; and, strange to say, Hullin, casting his eyes through the

darkness in the direction of Phalsbourg, thought he saw the fire and smoke of a volley of musketry announcing a sortie.

Catherine had resumed her former attitude; but her cheeks, just now as lifeless as a plaster mask, shook violently; her eye was again covered with a dreamy film. All the others listened; it might have been said that their existence hung upon her lips. Nearly a quarter of an hour had passed, when the old woman slowly continued:

"They have crossed the enemy's lines. They are hastening to Lutzelbourg. I see them. Gaspard and Divès are in front, with Desmaretz, Ulrich, Weber, and our friends from the city. They come! They come!"

She was silent anew; a long while yet she listened; but the vision was gone. Seconds succeeded to seconds, slow as centuries, when suddenly Hexe-Baizel began to say, in a sharp voice:

"She is mad! she has seen nothing. Marc, I know him. He is laughing finely at us. What is it to him if we perish? Provided he has his bottle of wine and chitterlings, and can smoke his pipe quietly in the chimney-corner, it's all the same to him. Ah! the wretch!"

Then all relapsed into silence, and the unfortunates, a moment revived by the hope of a near deliverance, fell back again into despair.

"It is a dream," thought they; "Hexe-Baizel is right; we are condemned to die of hunger."

In the meantime, night was come. When the moon rose behind the tall fir-trees, casting her pale rays on the sorrowful groups of the besieged, Hullin only was still watching, though burnt up with fever. He heard

far, very far off in the gorges the voices of the German sentinels calling out "*Wer dà! Wer dà!*" the camp patrols going their rounds through the woods, the shrill neighing of the horses at picket, their stamping, and the shouts of their keepers. Towards midnight the brave man ended, however, by going to sleep like the rest. When he awoke, the village clock of Charmes was striking four. Hullin, at the sound of its distant vibrations, aroused himself from his stupor; he opened his eyelids, and as he was looking round, in a sort of bewildered manner, striving to recover his faculties, the dim light of a torch passed before his eyes; a fear came over him, and he said to himself:—"Am I going mad? The night is quite dark, and yet I see torches."

And yet the flame re-appeared; he regarded it more closely, then rose abruptly, pressing for a few seconds his hand against his contracted face. Then, hazarding another look, he saw distinctly a fire on the Giromani; on the other side of the Blanru; a fire which swept the heavens with its purple wing, and flickered among the shadows of the fir-trees on the snow. And, recollecting that this signal had been agreed on between himself and Piorette to announce an attack, he began to tremble from head to foot; cold drops of sweat stood on his face, and walking on tiptoe through the darkness, like a blind man, with outstretched hands, he stammered:

"Catherine! Louise! Jérôme!"

But no one replied to him, and after having groped about in this way, thinking he was walking, while in reality he was not taking a single step, the unhappy man fell back, exclaiming:

"My children! Catherine! They come! We are saved!"

Immediately there was heard a vague murmur; it seemed as if the dead were re-awakening. There was a burst of dry laughter; it was Hexe-Baizel, gone mad from suffering. Then Catherine exclaimed:

“Hullin! Hullin! Who spoke?”

Jean-Claude, recovered from his emotion, exclaimed, in a firmer tone:

“Jerôme, Catherine, Materne, and you all, are you dead? Do you not see that fire down there, on the side of the Blanru? It is Piorette, who is coming to our assistance.”

And, at the very same moment, a loud explosion rolled through the gorges of the Jægerthâl with the sound of a tempest. The trumpet of the last judgment would not have produced more effect on the besieged; they suddenly awoke.

“It is Piorette! It is Marc!” was screeched by voices, broken, dry—voices of mere skeletons; “they come to save us!”

And all these poor wretches strove to rise; some sobbed; but they had no more tears. A second explosion brought them to their feet.

“Surely that is platoon firing,” exclaimed Hullin; “our people fire also in platoons; we have soldiers of the line; hurrah for France!”

“Yes,” replied Jerôme, “Dame Catherine was right; the Phalsbourgiens are coming to our relief; they are descending the hills of the Sarre, and there is Piorette, now heading the attack on the Blanru.”

In effect, the firing began to resound from both sides at once, towards the plateau of the Bois-des-Chênes and the towering heights of the Kilbéri.

Then the two leaders embraced each other; and as

they walked on tiptoe through the thick darkness, trying to gain the edge of the rock, all of a sudden Materne's voice was heard, loudly exclaiming:

"Take care, my lads, the precipice is there!"

They stopped, looking down at their feet; but there was nothing to be seen; a gust of cold air coming up from the abyss alone warned you of the danger. All the mountain tops and the surrounding gorges were plunged in thick darkness. On the sides of the mountain opposite, the lights from the firing flashed like lightnings, illuminating now an old oak, the dark outline of a rock, now a cluster of furze bushes, and groups of men going and coming as in the midst of a fire. Two thousand feet below, in the depth of the gorges, were heard heavy sounds, the gallop of horses, confused clamours mingling with the word of command. At times the cry of the mountaineer hailing, that prolonged cry, echoing from one mountain top to the other, "He! oh! he!" rose to the topmost height of the Falkenstein like a sigh.

"It is Marc," said Hullin; "it is the voice of Marc."

"Yes, it is Marc who is bidding us keep up our courage," replied Jérôme.

All the others, crouching round them, with outstretched neck, and hands grasping the edge of the rock, strained their eyes to see. The firing continued with a vivacity which betrayed the fierceness of the battle, but it was impossible to see anything. Oh, what would they have given to take part in this supreme conflict, the unfortunates! With what ardour would they have thrown themselves into the fray! The dread of being again abandoned, of seeing at daylight

their defenders in retreat, rendered them dumb with fear.

Meanwhile, day was beginning to dawn; the first pale glimmer of light was breaking over the dark tops of the mountains; some rays descended into the shadowy valleys; half-an-hour after they silvered the misty vapours of the abyss. Hullin, casting a look through these breaks in the clouds, was able at length to recognise the position. The Germans had lost the heights of the Valtin and the plateau of Bois-des-Chênes. They were now massed in the valley of Charmes, at the foot of the Falkenstein, a third part of the way up the side, to be out of the reach of their adversaries' fire. Opposite the rock, Piorette, master of Bois-des-Chênes, was ordering barricades to be thrown up on the side of Charmes. He was going hither and thither, the end of his pipe between his lips, his felt hat cocked on his ear, his carbine slung over his shoulder. The blue axes of the woodcutters glittered in the morning sun. To the left of the village, on the side of the Valtin, in the middle of the brushwood, Mare Divès, on a little black horse, with a long flowing tail, his long sword in his hand, was pointing to the ruins and the *schlitten* road. An officer of infantry, and some national guards in blue coats, were listening to him. Gaspard Lefèvre, alone, in advance of this group, leaning on his gun, seemed thoughtful. It might be seen from his attitude that he was forming desperate resolutions for the moment of attack. In fine, quite on the summit of the hill, against the wood, two or three hundred men, ranged in line, with grounded arms, stood watching also.

The sight of this small number of defenders wrung the hearts of the besieged; so much the more that the

Germans, seven or eight times superior in numbers, were beginning to form two columns of attack to regain the positions they had lost. Their general was sending horsemen in all directions carrying orders. Rows of bayonets were beginning to defile.

"It's all over!" said Hullin to Jérôme. "What can five or six hundred men do against four thousand in line of battle? The Phalsbourgiens will return home, and say, 'We have done our duty!' And Piorrette will be crushed."

All the others thought the same; but that which raised their despair to its height was to see all at once a long file of Cossacks debouch in the valley of Charmes at full gallop, and the fool Yégof at their head, galloping like the wind; his beard, the tail of his horse, his sheepskin, and his red hair all streaming in the wind. He looked at the rock, and brandished his lance above his head. At the bottom of the valley, he spurred straight up to where the major-general of the enemy's army stood. Arrived near him, he made some gestures indicating the other side of the plateau of Bois-des-Chênes.

"Ah! the wretch!" exclaimed Hullin. "See! he is telling him that Piorrette has no barricades on that side of the mountain, and that it must be taken in the rear."

In effect a column immediately set itself on march in that direction, whilst another directed its movement towards the barricades to mask that of the first.

"Materne!" exclaimed Jean-Claude, "are there no means of sending a bullet after the fool?"

The old hunter shook his head. "No," said he, "it is impossible; he is out of reach."

At this moment, Catherine gave vent to a savage cry

—a hawk's cry. "Let us crush them!—let us crush them as we did at the Blutfeld!"

And this old woman, a moment before so weak, rose and flung herself upon a mass of rock, which she lifted with her two hands; then, with her long scanty gray locks, her hooked nose drawn down to her compressed lips, lank cheeks, and bent back, she advanced with a firm step to the very edge of the abyss, and the rock cleft the air, tracing an immense curve.

A horrible noise was heard below. Splinters of fir-trees flew about in all directions, then an enormous stone was seen to rebound at a hundred paces with fresh impetus, roll down the steep descent, and, with a final bound, fall upon Yégof, and crush him at the very feet of the general of the enemy's forces. All this was accomplished in a few seconds.

Catherine, standing on the edge of the rock, laughed a laugh that sounded more like a rattle, and that seemed as if it would never come to an end.

And all the others, all those phantoms, as if inspired with a new life, threw themselves upon the crumbling ruins of the old *burg*, exclaiming—"Death! death! Let us crush them as at the Blutfeld!"

Never was a more horrible scene beheld. Those beings, at the very gates of the tomb, lean and squalid as skeletons, found fresh strength for carnage. They stumbled no more; they tottered no more. They lifted each one his stone, and ran to hurl it down the precipice; then returned to take another, without even looking at what was passing below.

Now figure to yourselves the stupor of the *kaiserlicks* at this deluge of ruins and rocks. They had all turned round at the first sound of the stones crashing down

one after another over the shrubs and the clumps of trees, and at first they remained as if petrified ; but raising their eyes still higher, and seeing other stones descending and descending still, and, above all that, spectres running hither and thither, lifting up their arms, emptying them, and beginning again ; seeing their comrades crushed—rows of fifteen and twenty men overthrown at a single blow—an immense cry resounded from the valley of the Charmes, as far as the Falkenstein, and in spite of the voice of the leaders, in spite of the firing, which recommenced right and left, all the Germans fled in disorder to escape this horrible death.

When the rout was at its height, the general of the enemy's army had, however, succeeded in rallying a battalion, and effecting a quiet retreat towards the village. There was something in this man, calm in the midst of disaster, grand and dignified. From time to time he turned round to cast a gloomy look at the falling masses of rock which were making bloody gaps in his column.

Jean-Claude observed him ; and in spite of the intoxication of triumph, in spite of the certainty of having escaped famine, the old soldier could not restrain a feeling of admiration.

"Look," said he to Jérôme, "he does as we did on returning from the Donon and the Grosmann : he remains to the last, and only yields step by step. Truly there are men of courage in every country."

Marc Divès and Piorètte, witnesses of this stroke of fortune, came down through the fir-trees to endeavour to cut off the retreat of the enemy's general, but they could not succeed in their attempt. The battalion, re-

duced to half, formed a square behind the village of Charmes, and slowly re-ascended the valley of the Sarre, at times stopping, like a wounded wild boar who turns upon the pack, when the men of Piorette and those of Phalsbourg tried to press it too closely.

Thus ended the great battle of Falkenstein, known in the mountain under the name of the *Battle of the Rocks*.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE battle was hardly over, about eight o'clock, when Marc Divès, Gaspard, and about thirty mountaineers, with panniers of provisions, ascended the Falkenstein. What a spectacle awaited them up there! All the besieged, stretched on the ground, seemed dead. It was in vain to shake them, to shout in their ears, "Jean-Claude! Catherine! Jérôme!"—they answered not. Gaspard Lefèvre, seeing his mother and Louise motionless and with clenched teeth, told Marc that if they did not recover he would blow out his brains with his gun. Marc replied that every one was free to do as he pleased, but that, for his part, he should not blow out his brains for Hexe-Baizel. At length, old Colon having deposited his pannier on a stone, Kasper Materne suddenly sniffed its contents, opened his eyes, and, seeing the provisions, began to clash his teeth like a fox on the chase.

Then they understood what was the meaning of that; and Marc Divès, going from one to the other, simply held his flask under their noses, which sufficed to bring them round. They wanted to swallow all at once; but Doctor Lorquin, in spite of his delirium, had still the good sense to warn Marc not to listen to them, and that the least over-feeding would kill them. So, for this reason, each one received nothing but a little

bread, an egg, and a glass of wine, which singularly revived their moral courage. They then placed Catherine, Louise, and the others upon *schlittes*, and re-descended to the village.

As to painting now the enthusiasm and emotion of their friends when they saw them return, leaner than Lazarus rising from the grave, it is a thing impossible. They looked at each other, embraced; and at each fresh comer from Abreschwiler, from Dagsburg, from St. Quirin, or elsewhere, it was all gone over again.

Marc Divès was obliged to relate more than twenty times the story of his journey to Phalsbourg. The brave smuggler had not been much favoured by fortune. After having escaped by miracle from the bullets of the *kaiserlicks*, he had fallen, in the valley of Spartzprod, into the midst of a troop of Cossacks, who had stripped him of everything. He had been compelled to wander afterwards during two weeks round the Russian posts that encircled the town, braving the fire of the sentinels and risking twenty times to be arrested as a spy, before being able to penetrate into the place. To crown all, the governor, Meunier, alleging the weakness of the garrison, had at first refused all assistance; and it was only at the pressing solicitation of the citizens of the town that he at length consented to detach two companies.

The mountaineers, listening to this recital, admired the courage of Marc, his perseverance in the midst of dangers.

"Oh!" the big smuggler would good-humouredly reply to those who congratulated him, "I have only done my duty. Could I leave my comrades to perish? I knew well it was no easy matter. Those dogs of

Cossacks are more cunning than Custom-house officers ; they will scent you out like ravens. But no matter ; we have outwitted them all the same."

When five or six days were passed, every one was afoot. Captain Vidal, of Phalsbourg, had left twenty-five men at the Falkenstein to guard the ammunition. Gaspard Lefèvre was of the number. The young fellow came down every morning to the village. The Allies had all passed into Lorraine ; no more was seen of them in Alsace, except round the strong places.

Soon news was brought of the victories of Champ Aubert and of Montmirail ; but times of great misfortune were at hand. The Allies, in spite of the heroism of our army and the genius of the Emperor, entered Paris.

This was a terrible blow for Jean-Claude, Catherine, Materne, Jérôme, and all the mountaineers ; but the recital of these events does not enter into our history ; others have related them.

Peace made, in the spring they rebuilt the farm of Bois-des-Chênes. The woodcutters, sabôt-makers, masons, bargemen, and all the workmen of the country lent a hand.

About the same period, the army having been disbanded, Gaspard cut off his moustaches, and his marriage with Louise took place.

On that day all the combatants arrived from the Falkenstein and the Donon, and the farm received them with doors and windows wide open. Every one brought his presents to the bride and bridegroom — Jérôme, little shoes for Louise ; Materne and his sons, a fine heathcock, the most amorous of birds, as everybody knows ; Divès, packets of smuggled tobacco

for Gaspard ; and Doctor Lorquin, a parcel of fine linen.

There was open table kept even in the barns and outhouses. What was consumed in wine, bread, meat, tarts, and *kougelhof*, we cannot say ; but what we know is, that Jean-Claude, who had been very gloomy and depressed since the entry of the Allies into Paris, brightened himself up on that day by singing the old air of his youth as gaily as when he set off, gun on shoulder, for Valmy, Jemmapes, and Fleurus. The echoes of the Falkenstein opposite repeated from afar this old patriotic song—the grandest, the most noble that man has ever heard under heaven. Catherine Lefèvre beat time upon the table with the handle of her knife ; and if it is true, as many say, that the dead come to listen when we speak of them, our brave fellows must have been satisfied, and the King of Diamonds have foamed in his red beard.

Towards midnight, Hullin rose, and addressing the newly-married couple, said to them :

“ You will have brave children ; I will dance them upon my knees ; I will teach them my old song ; and then I will go and rejoin my forefathers ! ”

So saying, he embraced Louise, and arm-in-arm with Marc Divès and Jérôme, he went down to his little cottage followed by all the wedding guests, singing in chorus the sublime song.

Never was there seen a more beautiful night ; innumerable stars sparkled in the deep blue sky ; there as a gentle rustling among the shrubs at the foot of the mountain beneath which so many brave men had been interred. Every one experienced by turns feelings of joy and of regret.

On the threshold of the modest dwelling there was shaking of hands and wishing good-night; and then all, some to the right, others to the left, returned to their villages.

“Good night, Materne, Jérôme, Divès, Piorette, good-night!” exclaimed Jean-Claude.

His old friends returned the salute, waving their hats, and they all said to themselves:

“There are still days when one is very happy to be in the world. Ah! if there were never either plagues, or wars, or famines—if men could agree together, love and help each other—if no unjust quarrels rose between them, the earth would be a real Paradise!”



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